ORGANISING POP:

Why so few pop acts make pop music.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Michael Lewis Jones.

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ABSTRACT.

Organising Pop: why so few pop acts make pop music.

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At any one time thousands of pop acts aspire to making hit records - the only guarantee that the music they make is indeed popular music. Of these aspirant acts, only a tiny percentage actually make pop records that have a chance of reaching a mass market for popular musical products. What is more surprising is that only one-in-eight of pop acts signed by major record companies goes on to attain popular success. This study is concerned to discover what it is about the nature of record-making that so regularly ends in the failure of the vast majority of pop acts signed to major record companies.

As a search for the answer to a question, this research study begins by attempting to define and qualify the terms of its analysis. Within this, the position of the researcher and the methods of data collection allowed by that position are explored in some detail. This exploration is necessitated by the singularities of my position as researcher - not only do I discuss record making from the perspectives gained through my own experience of that activity; I also explore a record I helped to make. The method applied in this case, 'Intellectual Autobiography', is novel, but not unprecedented. Additional data is generated through an adaptation of an allied methodology - that of 'Interpretive Interactionism' - in the construction of the 'case histories' of two further pop acts who also failed to make hit records for major companies.

The 'singularity' of this research project is further expressed in the nature of its theorisation - where theory is the *goal* rather than the medium of the study. This does not render it an exercise in empiricism, however. The nature of the subject matter should indicate how problematic is the making of music that becomes popular music only through the agency of mass sales. In exploring the coincidence, interaction and mutual dependency of music-making and musical commodity-making, this study analyses the production processes of popular music. It does this, firstly, by considering what representations exist of popular music production in the literature on popular music. It then suggests that concepts developed in the field of Organisation Theory can assist in the further development of the understanding of the industrial processes of popular music production.

The analysis of the data generated in the construction of the three case histories through the application of Organisation Theory concepts leads to the proposition that a 'supra organisation' is called into existence by the process of record-making. The study then draws the conclusion that this notion of the 'supra organisation' can be utilised as an heuristic device for the analysis of record-making as a dynamic whole. Suggestions are then made for further research into popular music-making which proceeds from an appreciation of the need to treat record-making holistically and to access it through a modified version of the practice of ethnomethodological ethnography.

Introduction.

This study seeks an answer to a single question: why do so many popular music acts signed to major record companies fail to make music that becomes popular? Quite clearly, when dealing with a term as fluid as 'popularity' and with the equally broad, and connected, notions of the 'success' or 'failure' of pop acts and the records they make, a considerable degree of qualification is required. Before examining these terms more closely, we need to identify the origin of the question, itself. This study was motivated by a combination of two statistics: firstly, of all pop acts extant at any one time, only a tiny percentage will win a record deal with a major company; and, secondly, only one-in-eight of these signed pop acts will go on to make a profit - where 'profit-making' is the immediate evidence that the act's work sold in the kind of quantities that verified its popularity. In turn, profit-making from mass sales is the only real guarantee that the act will continue to record its music and, therefore, continue to exist as a pop act beyond the most local of levels - at least until the next round of record releases takes place.

The provenance of the statistics referred to above will be discussed in Chapter One but, already, it should be apparent that much more than the terms so far identified will require qualification in the early stages of this inquiry (in fact the inquiry can only proceed through such a process of qualification). For example, we will need to clarify the choice and nature of the term 'pop act'; we will need to probe the implied connection between making popular music and 'making a profit'; and we will need to confront the further implication that music-making and record-making are discrete but connected activities where the 'success' or 'failure' of pop acts is

concerned. All of this will be the work of the introductory chapter, here I wish to draw attention to a more fundamental and foundational issue - that of the singularity of this work as a Ph.D thesis in Popular Music Studies.

My reason for mounting the attempt to address the phenomenon of the extremely high failure rate amongst aspirant pop acts is a complex one but is linked inextricably with my own experience of making records over a thirteen-year period. It is linked, also, with the fact that I had been a pop fan for a very long time before I began to write, and to collaborate on, songs that might attract the attention of record companies. As an avid consumer of pop I took certain pre-conceptions of how pop success is created with me into the music industry. The usefulness of these pre-conceptions was quickly exploded. Equally quickly, what had begun as a thrilling exercise in making pop music turned into a demanding and dismaying encounter with the protocols of survival as a pop act. Without over-dramatising the experience, it can certainly be described as a learning-curve of considerable upward-steepnesss.

As a consequence of the decline in the fortunes of Latin Quarter, the pop act of which I was a member, I needed to find new ways of generating an income. In the earliest phases of that transition away from a complete reliance on song-writing and record-making as the sole source of my income, I became involved in a variety of pop-related projects - from developing courses in song-writing and in music industry practices in a variety of academic arenas, to the earliest stages of pop management with a large number of acts. The more diverse, and, in some ways, concentrated, became my attention on the various processes involved in creating music and in creating pop groups, the more I became concerned with the general question of why pop happens in the ways that it does.

Inevitably, when I committed to researching pop, I needed to clarify precisely what it was that I intended to research. Initially, I determined to research not only the 'processes' of becoming a pop act, but also how these processes might be argued to inflect the making of pop music, itself. Further, because I had begun to read the academic literature on pop, I wanted to examine why it was that accounts of popular music-making tended not to consider that such inflections are the very core of the pop experience. On narrowing my concerns to these (enormously broad!) parameters I was then forced to recognise that it was my own experience that had driven me to argue the connections between 'pop processes' and the practices of pop composers as the 'core of the pop experience'. Even so, my 'experience' was no longer limited just to that of the act I had been involved with, it now stretched, in a disordered and unstructured way, to the concerns and practices of the many aspirant pop acts I had begun to come into contact with.

As a consequence of making these cumulative recognitions I then determined that, in order for me to mount a popular music research project of any kind, I needed to explore how my experience of making pop connected with my position as researcher - for, whatever aspect of popular musical experience I researched, it would remain the case that my judgements would be informed by a hidden 'reservoir' of 'prejudices' or 'pre-judgements'. In this way, while I remained committed to exploring why pop 'worked' in the ways that I believed that it did, I needed to systematise my research in such a way that my 'prejudices' could be explored. Further, I needed to explore why it was that I could not find my experience (this 'broader' experience that included interactions with aspirant pop acts) reflected in the academic literature on popular music. From this more precise focus, I then began to re-read the literature with a new awareness - an awareness that I was making my own

judgements about judgements made within that literature from an untheorised body of 'experience'. On undertaking this differently-informed reading the previously-quoted statistics took on a new significance for me - a significance that had two 'phases'.

Firstly, the recognition that vastly more acts fail rather than succeed helped me connect my own experience, and the experiences of many of the acts I had encountered over the years, with the literature on pop. It did this for the reason that Latin Quarter had 'failed' and for the reason that so many of the acts I came to encounter would never 'succeed'. I then realised that the tremendous profligacy of the music industry spoke of a way of understanding the production (and, perhaps, the reception) of popular music that was different from the various representations made of those processes in the literature on pop. Further, and secondly, the realisation that different methods of accounting for pop might exist was strengthened by the discovery of a marked tendency within even the literature that drew attention to this profligacy - which was that its *consequences* were not factored into the judgements made in those texts, whether these were about pop music, pop acts or the music industry itself.

The identification of an apparent over-sight in the literature on pop did not give me licence simply to proceed with research because, while my research area was now more closely defined, it remained the case that the conduct of research would still be likely to be informed by my 'prejudices'. What was then required was a method that allowed me, simultaneously, to draw on my experience and to reflect on what it was I was drawing on - and to make both processes accessible to the reader. The different aspects of this research practice will be discussed at the appropriate junctures, but a sense that the 'singularity' of this research lies not simply with the

position of the researcher but in the impact of that position on the conduct of research itself, should already be apparent.

Understood against this background, what makes this research study distinct is that it exists more as a search *for* theory rather than as the testing of an existing theory against fresh 'evidence'. This is not to suggest that no theories exist within the broad, if under-developed, work that comprises the emergent discipline of 'Popular Music Studies'; rather, it is to acknowledge that, in the first instance, I came to the academy from the field. On this basis, it would be illegitimate to 'discover' theory in the academy and then to apply it in a comparatively indiscriminate way to whatever aspects of either popular music production or consumption pre-occupied me. Because of this reversal of the 'normal' research journey (at least in the foundational stages of this research) I considered it vital to explore what judgements I had made of how pop is conducted as a musical and as a business practice not as a preliminary to study, but as an intrinsic part of the process of research, itself. What, then, gives this work its singularity is that it works *towards* theory rather than *through* it - but this does not mean that it exists as simple empiricism.

The fact that so very few pop acts achieve recognisable pop success problematises the pop process. In whatever ways we define the terms, the processes that result in the 'success' of a tiny handful of pop acts and in the 'failure' of the vast majority, do not explain themselves. This study will begin by exploring the origin of the statistics of 'success' and 'failure'. It will then proceed by exploring the representations made within the literature on pop of the processes that might have produced those statistics. Following this, it will be necessary to explore more fully the implications of my position as researcher for the bearing this has on the collection and analysis of data. Data will then be generated through the medium of case

histories of three pop acts who all failed to produce successful albums for major companies. Analysis of this data will then be conducted within and through the theoretical framework suggested by the conduct of the inquiry, thus far. From this analysis, conclusions will then be drawn both on the specific question of the high incidence of failure amongst signed acts and on any wider implications for the further study of popular music suggested by the nature, conduct and conclusions of the research so generated.

Preface.

In advance of the necessary clarification of terms referred to in the Introduction, it is worth indicating the central concerns of this study. The purpose of this research is to investigate, and to seek explanations for, the root causes of the extremely high failure rate amongst pop acts signed to major record companies. It concentrates on the production processes of popular music-making for the reason that the fate of the majority of acts and the records they make is sealed within those processes. Arguably, that the majority of pop records fail to achieve mass sales is a self-fulfilling prophesy - either they are withdrawn by record companies before selling begins or they are released but are neither marketed nor promoted with the effort and will that might bring them to the attention of a mass market of record buyers.

On this basis, the primary focus of this study will be on the various tiers and forms of interaction that take place between pop acts and all the related intermediary figures and organisations involved in organising the production of popular musical products. In focusing attention on these 'interactions' - which, together, constitute the production processes of popular music-making - the suggestion is not implied that the reception and consumption of music is unimportant; rather, it is to suggest that the market for popular musical products is not a perfect one. As remarks in the Introduction will have indicated, only a tiny percentage of aspirant acts are signed by major record companies and, of these, only a further small percentage go on to achieve mass sales. Whatever the audience makes of the music it hears, we need to recognise that the music available for them to listen to is limited by decisions made,

in the first instance, by music producing companies and, subsequently, by music producing companies in interaction with music-making acts.

The history of popular music is a history of mass selling records - but for every 'hit' there have been many more 'misses'. Pop records neither make themselves nor sell themselves. Given this, it is reasonable to suggest that aspects of their making must connect with aspects of their selling, or failure to sell. This is not to make the further suggestion that, simply, 'the public wants what the public gets' (to quote The Jam) but it does indicate that the 'organisation' of pop might be at least as important as the aesthetics of pop where the making of hit records is concerned.

Organising Pop:

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Chapter One:

Making Music in the Hope of Making Popular Music.

Part One: Establishing the Field.

Introduction.

> 'The point is that Rock and Roll, as I see it, is the ultimate populist art-form, democracy in action, because it is true: anybody can do it'
> (Lester Bangs - The Penguin Book of Rock and Roll Writing London, Viking, 1992).

What interests me about this observation is its conclusion: 'anybody can do it'. If anybody can make Rock and Roll, how do we explain the fact that, as soon as we begin to look for evidence of this 'populist democracy' in action we immediately run into the reality that very few people, in fact, exercise this 'democratic' right? Rather, there are few makers of Rock and Roll and enormous numbers of consumers. If we

set aside the various notions which see an act of consumption as an individual sense-making and, therefore, authoring practice, and concentrate instead on who picked up the guitar or plugged in the sampler in the first place, then hard statistical evidence about how many people are playing their own original variant on, or version of, Rock and Roll in Britain at any one time, is almost impossible to come by.

Sara Cohen, in her work on Rock music in Liverpool, refers to the 'large number of bands in the city' (1991. p. 19) but argues that this condition is not unique to Liverpool, whatever the heritage of the 'Merseyboom' of the 1960's; instead, she cites the work of Bennett (1980); White (1983) and Finnegan (1992) as some of the very few studies that research the experience of local music-making and she repeats (with minor qualification) Finnegan's estimation, based on her study of music-making in Milton Keynes, that there is one Rock band for every one thousand inhabitants of a city (and, by implication, for the population as a whole). Despite the fact that this suggests a staggering fifty-six thousand Rock acts extant at any moment, and mindful of the fact that we need to factor-in Negus's (1992) codicil to this figure - that there are even more musicians who are not 'sporadically visible at a local level' and need to be counted in to the total (and that 'rock' is not the only popular music style) - the most provisional and preliminary conclusion we can draw from this single statistical source is that still comparatively few people appear to seize the democratic potential offered by Rock and Roll as an 'art-form'.

I have chosen to begin with the quotation from Lester Bangs because his sentiment seems, to me, to be far removed from the reality of how 'Rock and Roll' is made. This does not mean that I consider Bangs a 'bad writer' but to criticise his observation is to connect immediately with the ongoing assertion of the 'right' of pop music to be taken seriously. Without wanting, here, to condense the whole history of

Popular Music Studies (PMS) it is fair to observe that the right to research this particular aspect of popular culture has been particularly hard won. It has been forty years since Raymond Williams began to explore the anatomy of Leavisite 'Mass Cultural' disdain for popular products but its pervasiveness in elite institutions persists to this day. Pop music has been the last of the popular cultural industries to be granted attention by academia. This helps to explain the paucity of information on the actual experience of the lives of pop musicians available to us. What it means, also, and more generally, is that as the study of popular music is now at least admitted by academia, there is a need to go beyond the first engagements with antipathy for popular products and to cut through the hyperbole that surrounded those encounters. When we discuss the making of 'Rock and Roll', then, whatever its stylistic variations and the fascinating convolutions of its history, what we confront in any study of this music is the fact that it is recorded music that has always been made to be sold in great quantities. 'Anybody' can pick up a guitar but not everybody can make a record of the sounds they make with that guitar; and far fewer can hope that the record they make will become a 'hit', a popular success.

Popular Music.

On the above basis, that popular music (especially since Rock and Roll) is recorded music that has always been made to be sold in great quantities, and from this point onwards, I intend to use the term 'Pop' as a generic description for all music that is made on these terms; and 'Pop Act' as any act that makes such music. My reasons for this are, in the first instance, to avoid the kind of pejorative conflicts about the nature and value of specific styles - 'Indie', 'Folk', 'Dance' 'Metal', 'Rock', 'R & B', and so on, are all imprecise terms and carry with them an ideological baggage

accumulated through years of music journalism. I use 'Pop Act' partly because it serves a pragmatic function as a dual singular/plural descriptor; partly also because, as above, I use the term 'pop' in a generic way; but my use is also guided by the need to avoid further pejorative conflicts around the notion and degrees of 'artistry' in the performance and composition of popular music.

The notion of the 'pop artist' is very much a part both of the historical development of pop itself and of the major changes in the ways that pop has been written about over the decades. To introduce what would be a largely unsustainable distinction between 'acts' and 'artists' at this, or at any stage, would be to sow confusion rather than to aid clarity. To prefer 'pop act' over 'pop artist' is to avoid making any premature judgement about the relationship (or about the impossibility of a relationship) between 'art' and 'commerce'. It seems self-evident that pop music is not entirely manufactured - all composition begins in the human imagination - and a related series of creative as well as organisational and administrative actions are required to bring pop music to the attention of the public. What remains at issue in studies of pop is the nature of the relationship between creativity and industrial practices; the extent to which they serve and depend on each other; and on whose terms that service, and that dependency, is initiated and sustained. Whether we prefer to acknowledge it or not, pop has always been as much about selling manufactured commodities as it has about making music. Somehow human musical creativity and industrial processes (where these are also organised human actions) do interact to create pop music and it is this interaction and its consequences for what *becomes* popular music that will frame this discussion.

For example, pop differs from classical music, not just stylistically, but in the more fundamental way that, in the making of pop records, the recording process is

used to treat the notes of the musicians rather than to document the performance of a group of musicians who are interpreting a previously written score. Whatever its expression, all forms of pop music since the earliest years of Rock and Roll have used the studio as a site of additional, or even definitive, composition. Not only is the generic 'pop' justified in the above way, but the pivotal place that recording has in the realisation of some music as *popular* music (see below) carries within it the inextricable connectedness of the desire to make popular music with the need to invest capital in order that that desire should stand a chance of realisation.

Put simply, and in advance of any more detailed discussion, record manufacture (as well as the promotion and distribution of records) has to be paid for. 'Pop acts' make 'pop records' and it is reasonable to argue that they all make them in the hope that they sell millions of copies of those records - not just because they are ambitious but because pop records *have* to sell in mass quantities in order to be popular (again, see below). In order to achieve this aim, or at least reach a position where it might be realised, a pop act needs to be signed to a record company. On this basis, it is also reasonable to argue that in order to gain the attention, not just of record companies but any organisation that might help them realise the goal of signing to a record company, pop 'composers' compose in the anticipation that a market exists, or can be brought into being, for their particular creations because this is the only basis on which a record company will pay to make records of their work and pay, also, to promote and distribute them. Before proceeding, I need to make it clear that I intend to concentrate on pop acts that sign, ultimately, to major record companies in order to eliminate any impacts on their fate that might have issued from distinct limitations or inadequacies associated with the address made by small companies to huge markets.

Sketched in the very general way, above, this combined set of observations is contentious. It is contentious for reasons already partly touched on - PMS is still in its infancy; not only is there a dearth of ethnographic study of emergent and, therefore, aspirant pop acts, there is also a comparative dearth of studies of how record companies work with pop acts to make pop records. I will work on the assumption that the decision to pursue pop music-making is indeed inflected by the desire to realise the twin goals of recording compositions and selling large quantities of those recordings and that this will involve emergent pop acts in a continuous recognition of the need to be 'signed' to a record company. Cohen's work displays the degree to which emergent pop acts measure themselves against both their understanding of where they 'fit' musically in terms of their particular overview of what, in the past, has been successful as 'pop music', and also how they might attain the status of a signed act. What complicates the issue is that the fate of a pop act is not necessarily reducible or traceable solely to the sound they make. Although I will work from the simple definition of pop music expressed above (that pop is music that is recorded with the aim of mass sales) the emphasis of this study will not be on making recordings, as such, but on the *conditions of making records* - which is a much wider field, indeed.

Pop acts want to make records; record companies have to make commodities for sale. I will discuss the implications of the latter in greater detail below, but the point needs to made that, even when recording defines pop, it is not the whole of pop. Pop acts, not just pop songs, become commodified by record companies. At every stage of the commodification process there are issues that bear on how the act addresses either the total process of becoming commodified or aspects of this - signed acts do not simply concentrate on *recording* alone. At the hub of

commodification are the compositions that the act brings to the record company and the issue of how to record them to best effect often dominates the time an act spends under contract to a record company. But who decides what that 'best effect' consists of, how they establish its pursuit as the defining experience of being signed to a major company, and how this extends beyond the studio to a conception of the total of the act as a commodity are all questions that will need to be addressed in the course of this study.

Organising Music.

We cannot separate pop music from the conditions of its production (in the broadest sense) simply because it would not exist if it was not for the organised systems of manufacture, dissemination, distribution and sale. I can anticipate the types of criticisms that might immediately be raised against this observation (what, for example, were Cohen's acts playing if it was not pop music?) and I will elaborate on this point below; here I want only to affirm that, because pop is music that is created through, and is sustained by, the music industry (and not by the record industry alone - see later); it cannot exist viably, for any great length of time, away from the prerogatives of how the production process is organised and realised within that industry. Arguably, all acts that make original pop music, whether this is stylistically innovative or not, are in one of four states - either they are seeking a deal, making a record, enjoying success or suffering failure. Pop music isn't viable away from an orientation or a direct connection to the production process because, crudely, if acts can't make money from selling records then they have to go back to their 'day jobs', or to no job at all as is usually the case to-day. On this basis, how to characterise the form and nature of production in the music industry, and what this

system of production can come to mean for its products and their producers, will be a central theme of this study; as it has been throughout the comparatively brief history of PMS. Its centrality flows from the earlier recognition that pop is music that is made not just by musicians but by musicians together with industrial capital.

'Capital', in the music industry, is a combination of cash invested in machinery, buildings, material and personnel, organised around the singular aim of creating and selling records. As we have noted, this fact alone severely compromises the notion that 'anybody can do it'; the only people who can truly make 'Rock and Roll' are the ones that the music industry chooses to invest in and, as we shall see, very few of these 'chosen ones' actually go on to make 'Rock and Roll' in the fullest sense of 'making it'. Rather, the majority confirm the origin of the music industry cliché (hinted at above), 'don't give up the day job'. Making pop music is an activity that was, during the years of full employment especially, always pursued at night; not just because this is when dance-halls or clubs are open and audiences are available, but because it was the only time when people who had jobs they disliked could write and rehearse the material they hoped would make them 'Rock and Roll Stars'. Yet, it is precisely because people make this commitment to music-making, rather than simply to consuming music, that the music industry exists in the way that it does. As a result of the unique relationship between 'supply' and 'demand' (see below), what makes the status of popular music as an industrial product so contested and controversial is the very high level of unique, human creativity involved in its production.

If we consider this last point above more closely, we are faced with an apparent contradiction: how can pop music be said to be 'created through, and .. sustained by, the music industry' and then, almost immediately, be shown to exist

beyond its confines? Part of what I will argue is that pop music-making, even in its rawest forms, never truly exists beyond the boundaries of the music industry. Clearly, this is to make an assertion ahead of any analysis, but if we look in more detail at the relationship between music-making and the industrial production of pop records (although, again, ahead of the main discussion of this relationship) then we can identify a signal difference, not just between Pop and other manufacturing industries, but between it and what have come to be called the 'cultural industries'. Where manufacturing is concerned, the ingredients for making steel occur naturally; they are combined only because some companies want to make cars or kitchen sinks from that material in the near certainty that a large-scale, social demand exists or can be created for them. The ingredients for records also occur 'naturally', in and through the determination of some people to make music; but the contrast with manufacturing industry is that, in the former, supply is called into being only when the potential demand for a product has been established; where music-making is concerned, the supply exists whether there is a demand or not - making music exists because people want to enjoy themselves *creating* music and not just because some company has identified a way of making money from the manufacture of musical commodities. Certainly, why people enjoy creating music is connected with their enjoyment of consuming the products of the music industry (pop stars and their records) and because they almost all will want to be part of the music industry themselves; but we can still contrast pop music-making with other, key cultural industries. For example, where the Film and Television industries are concerned, it is not the case that 'people' are 'out there' making films or game shows; people with ideas and the requisite technical materials have to be combined on the basis of an anticipated demand before production in most other cultural industries can go ahead. This is not the case with

pop music at the level of raw supply; that it becomes the case, and the consequences of this 'becoming', will, again, form a theme of this study.

That it is 'not the case' that record manufacturing companies have to wilfully combine the 'raw ingredients' of popular music - how the act sounds, how it looks, what interesting stories can be told about why and how the act makes music - before they can begin production should not blind us to the fact that these companies still perform an important, and distinctive, version of these activities. What record companies do is to select from hundreds of aspirant acts and then refine and commodify the ones whose music they choose to record. They engage in 'refinement' out of their understanding of potential market for the act and its records; they commodify because this is their business; and they do both despite the fact that acts have already achieved a degree of self-organisation and refinement in order to have attracted the attention of a record company in the first place.

To make the last recognition, above, is to confront immediately what is perhaps the central tension between record companies and pop acts (and, therefore, in what we eventually help create as popular music, by consuming the outcome). What pop acts have is a sense of self-identity formed around the creative pleasure they derive from making music. What record companies have is the power to make hit records. What record companies deploy when they choose to sign an act is their *own* sense of why they believe that a market can be made for the commodified totality of the sound and the identity of the act. In commodifying sound and identity, record companies bring their own developmental conceptions and practices to bear on the beliefs and practices that already exist within the act and between the act and whomever, thus far, they have come to work with (largely, but not solely, managers and their employees). When the various parties contract with each other, it is fair to

say that the contract, however detailed, cannot ever fully specify or de-limit these 'developmental' practices.

Record-making can be argued to be a distinct variant of commodity production, even of cultural commodity production, in that the contracted parties work neither to blue-prints nor to treatments and scripts. In record-making, all participants work to verbally negotiated estimations of the sound of pieces of music (either as live performances or in various stages of recording). Further, these 'estimations' are couched in the imprecise and esoteric terms of the 'hit' potential of those sounds. If the business of commodification is to take raw material and to transform it into a successful commodity then we need to recognise that the complex questions of how to set about the transformation of the act and its material into a commodified form that a record company can sell (where the company will always have its own, distinct, organisational priorities to respond to and comply with) will be continually open to contest between act and company. These questions will be open to contest because spheres of developmental competence cannot be delimited and, even more so, because what is being commodified is not just a sound but (usually) a group of human individuals. From this, the issues that concern me are those that relate to the potential impacts of the (necessary) commodification process on *all* pop acts, and not solely on ones that make hit records.

As we have noted, what record companies bring to the making of pop music is capital; but capital is not an abstract and neutral force, it is an organised, and organising, 'creative' one. What I mean by this is that we miss much of the detail of industrial production if we conceive of capital only as capital *goods*. 'Capital' in the music industry is not just the money to spend on recording studios, on pressing plants, on distribution systems, and on media advertisements, it is the employment of

individuals organised into teams of people to transform 'raw material' into a saleable commodity. These people will necessarily work towards organisational goals and within organisational parameters - particularly within budgets and to schedules - but it does not follow that individuals will either interpret goals or organise their tasks in identical ways; they will have their own senses of what makes a hit record or a successful commodity and this 'sensibility' must be understood as a 'creative' one. Negus has provided considerable insight into the patterns of recruitment and the working methods of record industry personnel and an exploration of his findings will form a large part of this study. Here we need to acknowledge the need always to remain aware that the problem of dealing with terms like 'capital' is that they tend to describe in huge 'brush strokes'. Equally, theories of capitalist production and, specifically, cultural production under capitalism, will operate at high levels of abstraction. What this study will concentrate on will be how acts 'come to' record companies and what happens to them there, rather than on any wider discussion of the nature of cultural commodities and cultural, industrial practices, however compelling these might be.

All private industries are capitalist, whether manufacturing, service or cultural, but not all firms within an industry, let alone all industries, operate in an identical manner. The music industry is made up of thousands of individual firms but the activities of that industry are dominated by a handful of major record companies. In general, the way that all these firms conduct their business is very different from the way that the Ford Motor Company conducts its business, but they are not less 'capitalist' for this. In this research I will deal with the ways in which the individual employees of the music industry attempt to 'actualise' the capitalist goal of 'profit making' in and through their relations with pop acts. What complicates their aim to

make profit is that what they must work with is not inert raw material but the creative acts of living individuals. At the very least, this demands a very different commodification strategy but, more than this, it involves a strategy that must harness and reconcile two powerful forces that are not necessarily congruent - the company will always wants a return on its investment and the pop act, in which the investment is made, will want, and expect, hit records. There is a tension here borne of the intensity that high expectation brings, but the tensions are greater than this. A company will always have many acts signed at any one time. This means, at the very least, that all those acts are at different stages of the record-making process. The company must deploy its resources and organise its time as effectively as possible and this will almost certainly mean an inequality of attention between acts. However 'important' an individual act might be to a company, they are still one amongst many - no act is bigger than a company - and, in this very fundamental sense, the individual pop act will always contend with a force greater than itself. On this basis, it does not prejudice this argument to observe that, when two such unequally resourced 'partners' combine, the potential power to define goals, and to specify methods for obtaining those goals, must lie with the stronger of the two. In this way, the issues of where power lies in record-making and in popular music, in general, how it is wielded, and with what effects for the 'health' of a pop act, will never be far from the centre of this discussion.

Before proceeding, and especially in view of the broad characterisation of the nature of the operation of, and relationships between, firms that make up the 'music industry' made in the preceding paragraph, it is worth stating here that I am aware that a substantial debate surrounds the question of changes in cultural industrial organisation, and that these, in turn, are part of a much wider debate on changes in

capitalism itself since the end of the 70's (see, for example, Tödtling, 1996). Hesmondhalgh (1996) gives a useful account of these, connected, debates. He identifies two, broad positions: firstly, there are theorists who argue that market fragmentation, the importance of independent labels, and 'new consensual relationships between small, large and enormous companies' obtain within the music industry; and that, therefore, the music industry is an exemplar of the trend away from Fordist mass production and towards 'Flexible Specialisation' (FS) and 'post-Fordism' within capitalism, in general. He then contrasts these views with an account of a changing capitalism that has restructured along new lines of integration in order to secure centralised, oligopolistic power at a global level - a restructuring in which 'the continuity of patterns of power in the recording industry' has been maintained. In my examination of the experiences of pop acts signed to major record labels, I intend to remain mindful that the music industry does not remain static in its practices and also that the analysis of how record companies operate has changed and developed through the work of successive theorists; but I propose to concentrate on what these theorists say, and can be argued to assume, about how pop acts *experience* major record companies rather than on how those companies have changed in their patterns of ownership and with regard to smaller labels and independent service providers.

All pop acts want to 'give up the day job'. Some do; some survive long enough to be able to call pop their job; but what contextualises their separate fates is not how well they make music but how well that music, and its makers, are organised as a commodity; and how effectively those music-makers contend with the process of commodification.

Part Two:

The Different Fates of Signed Pop Acts.

Organising Commodities.

Simon Frith has observed,

> The power of music comes .. from its popularity. Music becomes a mass culture by entering a mass consciousness .. mass music is recorded music, records which don't sell don't become popular, don't enter mass consciousness whatever their particular artistic claims (and) their authenticity.
> (Simon Frith, The Sociology of Rock, Constable, London, 1978 p. 203).

Frith's observation is a powerful one: in one stroke he separates pop music makers into the 'seekers' and the 'arrived'; the 'aspirants' and the 'achievers'. If we connect this sentiment with the work of Cohen, Finnegan, Bennett and White then we can begin to 'map' the reality of how 'the ultimate populist art form' exists in practice. Put simply, some people decide to write, play and perform versions or variants of popular music; a very small percentage of these pursue their interest in pop to the point of signing a contract with a major record company (Cohen quotes a rough 'rule of thumb' estimate that 'less than one percent of bands' would ever win a record contract - Cohen, 1992, p. 3). Once signed, however, that contract is not in itself enough to ensure success; as Cohen, again, observes 'fewer still would attain success'. On this basis, pop music is 'successful' music in the overtly quantitative sense that records of compositions have sold in a 'mass' way. Yet, in making this, seemingly simple, recognition we have to consider how far Frith's description of popular music as 'mass

music' completes the separation of 'pop' from the ideal expressed in the quote from Bangs at the beginning of this discussion.

In his attempt to establish what, musically, distinguishes Rock from other styles of popular music, Allan Moore is eager to secure the term 'style' as an expression of

> a degree of consistency which can be found in its musical rules and practices. (Moore, 1993, p. 1).

He does this in order to distinguish his identification of 'Rock' from other theorists who have discussed it as a 'genre' or a 'form' of music; but I take Frith's point to indicate an anterior 'state' to the description of any popular music in stylistic terms: mass sales are the guarantee that music that was written to be recorded and mass-marketed as popular music is confirmed as popular music, whatever its 'musical rules and practices'. In this way, pop has no 'essential' characteristics (however engaging it is to explore and discuss different aspects of style, genre and form); simply, 'pop' is recorded music that sells; if it doesn't sell then it is 'proto-pop music'; and it is this that Cohen's acts played.

The term 'proto-pop music' is, admittedly, an unusual one, but it is useful 'strategically' in the sense that it draws attention to the fact that 'hit' records represent only a fraction of the total of the music that *aspires* to popularity at any one time. So used are we to considering the whole of pop music as a combination of music that is currently commercially available, together with music that has been commercially successful in the past, that we tend to ignore the fact that there is much music we never hear (or never heard). This is overwhelmingly because the vast majority of pop acts are never signed by record companies, but it is also because so few acts that are signed go on to make successful records (see below). Consumers of popular music

remain, for the most part, ignorant of both the processes of its manufacture, in the broadest sense of its 'mode of production', and the struggles of those who reach the point of entry into the 'manufacturing stage'. As researchers in PMS, we cannot replicate this ignorance. In order to realise the full significance of the observation that popular music is commercially recorded music that has sold in mass quantities, we have to understand how it became that way; and one way of doing this is to identify what it was that prevented much of the music that aspires to popularity from realising itself as popular.

Clearly, consumers and researchers alike are encouraged to ignore pop's production processes, not simply by the excitement of consuming successful pop music and by the various distractions of the promotional process, but also by the difficulty of accessing the day-to-day practices of record companies and the virtual impossibility of accessing the daily lives of aspirant pop musicians. This is why Cohen's study is so important and why it is now so often quoted in the literature on popular music; it 'opens up' the subterranean world of the 'local band' and it does it very convincingly; but, nevertheless, by opening up the world of aspirant pop acts, Cohen thereby raises the question, 'what happens next'? What happens between 'self-indulgence in the bedroom and the kitchen' (Cohen, 1991, p. 23) and the entry into 'mass consciousness' (Frith, 1978, p. 203) of a tiny handful of pop acts?

Keith Negus, (1992) is the most recent researcher in PMS to attempt to analyse the process of the commodification of music. We find another 'rule of thumb' in *his* work - a study that looks not at emergent acts but at the practices of the labels that almost all acts dream of signing to. In passing, he reflects on the chances of success that such acts can expect:

> Record company staff assess potential acts with a working knowledge that approximately one in eight of the artists that they sign and record will achieve the level of success required to recoup their initial investment and start to earn money for both themselves and the company.

and, as he notes elsewhere,

A large number of acts do not achieve any form of success whatsoever.

(Negus, 1992, pp. 40-41).

Negus repeats this ratio of one successful act to eight unsuccessful acts at several different junctures and much of his analysis concludes with the insight that, even though conscious and deliberate and under-taken by seasoned professionals, so fragile and vulnerable to disruption and breakdown are the relations and conditions of production within record companies that a failed product can be the result of these breakdowns. What Negus does not conclude, although all his references to the extent and regularity of failure point in this direction, is that failure rather than success is the *typical* product of major record company activity.

This same objection could be made with regard to all the other researchers who have repeated similar 'rule of thumb' statistics on the majority failure of signed pop acts. For example, Hirsch (1972/ 1992) cites an observation made as early as 1964 by Schemel and Krasilovsky that,

> fewer than 20% of over 6,000 (45 r.p.m.) singles appear in record retail outlets', while far fewer still would have gone onto sell in mass quantities over the counters of those retail outlets. (Hirsch, 1992, p. 135)

Hirsch uses this statistic to develop his own understanding of record industry operation that identifies 'over production' as the key to the large gulf between signed acts and successful acts:

> Overproduction is a rational organizational response in an environment of low capital investment and demand uncertainty. Under these conditions it is apparently efficient to produce many "failures" for each success. (Hirsch, 1992, p. 135)

In The Sociology of Rock (1978) Simon Frith makes two, related observations on the subject of the gulf between ambition and success: Firstly the unsupported observation,

> It has been estimated that there are fifty thousand rock groups in Britain, of which less than a thousand has even a hope of getting a recording contract. (Frith, 1978, p. 76)

and then one supported by his own analysis into (presumably) BPI statistics:

> cultural industries have to make available a far greater number of goods than are eventually successfully marketed. In 1976, for example, British record companies issued 3,512 singles of which 229 made the top twenty, and nearly four thousand albums (including more than a thousand classical discs) of which about two hundred made the top thirty. (Frith, 1978, p. 75).

Notably, Frith takes the need 'cultural industries' exhibit to make available many products that are destined to fail almost wholesale from Hirsch. In Sound Effects (1983) 'the, new, totally revised version of The Sociology of Rock', to quote its book-jacket, Frith makes significant modifications to his overview of popular music-making (see chapter three) but he continues to draw on Hirsch's argument, albeit with different examples:

> the culture industry has to make available a far greater number of goods than are eventually sold. Of the four to five thousand LP's that are issued every year, for example, only about 10 percent make money, and only another 10 percent cover their own costs.. Because record companies don't sell most of the titles they release, they must, instead, maximise the profit on the records that do sell .. the records that do well cover their own costs many times over and so cover (the costs of the failures) as well' (Frith, 1983, p. 101-102).

Taken together, these observations represent a near-thirty year tradition of acknowledging the large-scale failure of pop acts that sign to major record companies, but this 'tradition' exists only as a by-product of research that concentrates on other aspects of popular music-making (of the nature of 'Rock Music', of the organisation of record companies, and so on). Perhaps the 'telescope' needs to be reversed. Much music is made, not just by aspirant acts, but by record companies signings, with the intent of it being realised as 'popular'. Studies of popular music tend to trace the roots of 'popularity' to intrinsic aspects of the music itself (Moore and many others), or to the ways in which pieces of music articulate the cultural concerns of the audience for that music (Frith 1978, Chambers 1985, Reynolds 1990). In this study, I do not intend to offer some replacement explanation for the popularity of music; rather to propose that if we examine commodification procedures from the point of view that these result more often than not in failed commodities, we might gain a different perspective on the movement from proto-pop music to pop music, proper.

On the basis of the above, this study is motivated by the need to suggest answers to a single question: why is it that seven out of eight acts signed to major labels, fail? We do not have to ask why the music industry lives with such a high failure rate; the answer is, simply and quite brutally, because it can afford to. As Frith made clear twenty years ago, so enormous is the income generated by successful acts that the 'failures' are easily paid for. For example, at the time of writing, the most recent estimate of the earnings of Oasis in the period 1995/6 have been put at over One Hundred Million pounds. Because the industry is so guarded about real earnings we will never know the true figure, but the gross from ticket sales alone for Oasis' (August 1996) Knebworth concert was over five and half million pounds, not

including the sales of merchandise, broadcast rights (and subsequent royalties yielded), franchises, and the revenues from the sales of the concert video. But the fact that success pays for failure still does not explain why, and how, failure comes about.

If overproduction is the root cause of large-scale failure (as Hirsch and Frith argue) then the simple conclusion we can draw from this argument is that most acts fail because most acts are never intended to succeed. While these views will need to be explored in greater detail before we can consider accepting them at face value, we still need to ask how this process manifests itself in the everyday reality of life in the music industry, when all acts that sign record contracts do so in the belief (in which they are encouraged) that they are destined for success. Negus breaks this pattern of explanation by arguing that, despite the fact that success ultimately pays for failure, advance costs are now so high that record companies would ideally like all their acts to succeed; that they do not he attributes to the hazards inherent in the commodification system (as we shall see). Again, however, this explanation begs similar questions to those that are raised by Frith's analysis of the operation of the music industry. What neither Hirsch, Frith nor Negus does is to analyse the music industry from the point of view of the experience of pop acts signed to major record companies. As a result, the fates of those acts are treated as merely the outcomes of music industry procedures, decisions and practices; the acts are passive entities rather than actors in their own destinies.

In this study, I intend to explore the life-experience of several pop acts, all signed to major record labels, and all of whom failed to make hit records. My aim will be to uncover how the processes of failure manifest themselves in individual cases. The location of the search for answers to the question of large-scale failure is the commodification process. This site of musical and business activity can be

addressed, more specifically, by asking the following, related or constituent, questions:

(1). Are there any common features in the experience of failed pop acts that might be understood as typical? If so,

(2). Do these 'features' stem mainly from flaws within the constitution of acts; flaws in music industry practices; or from regular combinations of particular aspects of both?

In pursuing an answer to these questions, this study is not conducted with any belief that a single-factor explanation exists for the familiar occurrence of failure. For example, it might be valid to argue that there is no need to 'explain' why so many pop acts 'fail'; their failure is self-explanatory, they were simply 'not good enough'. But to enter the territory of 'good' and 'bad' is to enter the arena of taste, as if this is some quantity of the mind, rather than a quality of social experience. It is also to enter the territory of the audience; as if this is a social 'given' rather than an economic construct. There is no space here to explore every one of the multiple dimensions engaged in the decisions of some people to write music; of others to pay for it to be recorded and promoted; and of still others to buy or not to buy the resultant records. Rather, this study will concentrate on the paradox of why it is that the music industry appears to be such a hazardous environment for pop acts. The address made to this question, this 'paradox', then proceeds from the recognition that what appears as only a single 'phase' of the life of a pop act (record-making) needs to be understood, itself, as a process, as a force-field of multiple interactions within the act; and between the act and all those agencies that, together, constitute the 'music industry'.

Conclusion.

If we return to the early 'lives' of pop acts (as represented in Cohen's work), it is safe to assume that when an aspirant act signs a record contract it will do so in a state of great excitement and in the anticipation of considerable material success. Yet, all acts sign in the certainty (if not the knowledge) that they have a one-in-eight chance of realising that success. In a 'macro' sense, the likelihood that an act will fail is pre-determined, but, if it was possible to take a 'snapshot' of all the acts signed to a major record company at any one time, how could an outside observer (or even members of the acts concerned) tell which seven of any eight would be likely to fail? This study will be concerned to examine the experience of failed pop acts. The method for this 'examination' is broached, below; but the decision to take this course in the search to understand of how the profligacy of the Music industry works in practice, is the one established above: if we are to understand the fates of pop acts we need to know not just what motivates them but what the effects are of the relationships they develop in their pursuit of the goal of mass sales. On this basis, we need to know why they make, individually and collectively, the decisions they do about how to develop 'careers' in the music industry. Only by tracking them through the stages of formation to failure can we begin to establish and identify whether factors in their formation as acts contributed to their falling foul of the enormously high hurdle represented by the daily practices of record companies; or whether, simply, those 'hurdles' defeat all but the most determined. As a result, we may be able to develop a new sense of why it is that, of thousands of 'proto-pop' makers, only a tiny minority actually make music that is popular.

Part Three:

Methods - Preliminary Observations.

Introduction

So far in this discussion it has been necessary to 'put on hold' a number of issues that relate to the clarification of key terms used in this analysis. It has also been necessary to delay larger questions of method. But the reasons that inform the choice of what can be postponed until the essence of the research project has been sketched out are themselves indicative of methodological choices that derive from an as yet unstated and unexamined methodological position.

In the following chapters I will need to look more closely at the 'range' of traditions that contribute to PMS and also, in greater detail, at studies of different aspects of popular music-making; even so, it has not been possible to proceed without referring to these 'traditions' and to some of the most prominent of those 'studies'. This is a work within an *emergent* research discipline, one that is not yet fully-constituted either in terms of its methods or its objects of analysis. Consequently, the construction of the argument thus far betrays tensions within this emergent field: notably that it is already apparent that this will be a study in the 'context' of popular music-making rather than one that focuses on the creation of musical 'texts'. As a study in and of the context(s) of popular music-making this research is a work of Sociology rather than Musicology. Certain conditions are created by this recognition, 'conditions' that will need to be returned to at later stages. Here it is necessary to observe that sociology is a mansion with many rooms and,

arguably, each of those rooms is defined by a method for generating knowledge about a subject area (rather than simply by the subject area itself).

Firstly, and broadly, this research is apparently 'Qualitative' rather than 'Quantitative' - it concerns itself with the experience of individuals and groups of individuals rather than with data derived from anonymous swathes of people grouped in categories of one kind or another. This acknowledged, we need to establish what kind of qualitative method we are dealing with. Already, several phrases have been used in this introduction that hint at the position of the researcher: notably, a brusque dispatch of 'the various notions which see an act of consumption as an .. authoring practice'; an admission that the choice of the opening observation (by Bangs) was informed by its being 'so far from the reality of how Rock and Roll is made'; and a further abrupt dismissal of 'issues of opinion about whether one raw material producer is an "artist" and another is not'. None of this is accidental. It stems from my own address to the process of making records and is borne of my experience of making records.

Between 1983 and 1996 I was a member of the pop act Latin Quarter. Latin Quarter recorded and released five albums (a sixth is in preparation; the fifth was written, recorded and released during my period of research for this study). Latin Quarter first signed to the, now defunct, independent label 'Rockin' Horse' in 1984. This label was taken over by Arista Records and, while with them, Latin Quarter achieved a British Top Twenty hit with 'Radio Africa'. Success in other, mainly Western European and Scandinavian, countries followed but the experience of recording an album for Arista proved particularly fraught; with the result that Latin Quarter produced a record, 'Mick and Caroline', than no-one involved in making the record (not act, manager nor record company) could find any merit in. So destructive

was the experience that Latin Quarter's career declined from then - but not before recording a subsequent album for RCA and releasing further albums for RCA Germany and the German independents, VMG and SPV. At the same time, the parallel career of Latin Quarter's manager, Marcus Russell (my oldest friend, his and my entry into the music industry were contingent on each other) improved to climax in his managership of Oasis, currently the most successful British pop act of the Nineties, and already one of the most successful British pop acts of all time. Consequently, I have been through the processes of forming a pop act, writing songs, signing deals, having hits, and failing to sustain a career in popular music. Meanwhile, I have experienced at close hand another's rise to the pinnacle of pop success.

Without exploring these experiences in any greater detail here, the bare fact of my having undergone them should indicate that this is not a standard exercise in qualitative research: my position as researcher in pop is not compromised by them, but is certainly problematised by my coterminous position as a maker of pop music. Even so, it is my contention that qualitative research is, itself, versatile enough to allow for the conduct of a research project by someone whose research 'journey' has not followed the accepted conventions of an identification of a research object within the academy followed by data collection in the field; but one that has, in part, reversed this process. I came to the academy with many experiences in the making of popular music and with many opinions already formed about how pop is made. I then went 'back out' into the music-making 'field' to generate more data. What I propose to analyse here is my own experience of making records together with the experience of others and to set what I find against what, so far, has been written about the business of record-making. In this way, I hope to determine whether new ways of considering

the record-making, and popular music-making, processes can be suggested. In this aim, I have to acknowledge that I come to the business of researching the music industry with a perspective on that industry and its practices that cannot be undone or set aside. If I cannot set these perceptions aside then I need to make them explicit. I come to this research with prejudices (judgements already made), but even in this attempt to organise a research project into and through those prejudices, I *change* them. They are changed by being made to account for themselves; they will be changed by being asked to bear the weight of fresh evidence. Even so, I need to confront the methodological implications of the existence of these 'prejudices' before I can use the experiences from which they derive as a point of comparison with the experiences of other music makers. Further, I have to address the methodological implications of exploring my own experience as a primary part of this research. Before beginning this address and before outlining, more precisely, the essentials of my methodological practice, it is necessary to consider more closely the frequency with which signed acts make misses rather than hits.

Evidencing the Extent of Record Label 'Failures'.

No-one keeps track of the pop acts that come and go and that never sign record deals (although some research of the fate of acts signed to the 'National Bands Register' might prove instructive). Equally, no-one keeps track of acts that sign to majors and fail to produce the anticipated hit records. Certainly, there are biographies of acts and there are the thoroughly researched articles of 'Record Collector' magazine to help draw up 'histories' of acts; but, at best, these are 'one-sided' histories, told either by partisan authors (cf. the work of Johnny Rogan) or else they are based on interviews with just one member of a pop act. Even when the 'act' might

be a single individual, we only get the story (or as much of it as they know and are willing to tell) in their own words. The 'real' story of an act's experience on a record label needs to be composed from contributions from all those involved in the production of a record (in the widest sense of production) and in the preparation of an act for the market-place. Essentially, the act has only a partial view of its own position and progress and any fuller account of an act's failure can take time and effort to unearth.

When we consider the researchers who have commented on the high casualty rate amongst signed acts, we find that, in almost all the cases where an attempt has been made to demonstrate the high ratio of failures to successes, that ratio is evidenced by an analysis of record releases to chart performance. In the recent past, Lopes (1992) and Christianen (1995) have taken their lead from the earlier work of Peterson and Berger (1975) and have offered similar exhaustive analyses of the chart performance of releases on a label-by-label basis. We will need to return to these writers in the next chapter. Here we should consider Frith's (1974) use of a similar comparative method that is more specifically targeted to the discussion in hand. This is an exemplary piece of work. Frith traces the fortunes of all the singles released in Britain during the period 1972/3 and he draws some very useful conclusions from the exercise. There is not the space here to conduct a comparable exercise but I intend to adapt Frith's method in order to draw attention to some of the potential weaknesses of the quantitative approach to issues of success and failure.

Before beginning this exercise, I want to identify why I intend to distinguish the music industry or music business from the record industry. In Negus's work (but he is certainly not alone in this) there is a tendency to make 'record industry' stand for the whole of the experiences encompassed in making pop music; in other instances,

'record industry' and 'music industry' are used interchangeably. The distinction between those employed by record companies and those employed in other music-related occupations needs to be maintained because, particularly in the case of emergent acts, many individuals with their own working methods, business practices and, more importantly, agendas will be encountered long before, and if ever, a representative of a record company strays across their path. In fact, this is implicit in Cohen and Finnegan's observations about the scale of unsigned pop act activity at any one time. All playing or performing acts will encounter their local 'representatives' of the music industry - people that, as a loose definition, earn part or all of their income from facilitating and servicing local pop acts. Already, this is controversial ground, the extent to which local managers, local studio owners and engineers, promoters, PA hire companies, roadies, DJ's, graphic designers, promotions firms, free-lance and local journalists and the like can be considered as 'facilitators' and 'service providers' is extremely contentious and will be referred to throughout the later stages of this discussion. The point here is that, while the major record companies form the centre of the music industry, for the obvious reason that they pay for, promote and distribute records, they are not the whole of it: signed acts spend little time in direct contact with record company employees in their working lives; rather, they have to develop relationships across the widest field of agencies that can assist them in their own self-organisation and self-promotion.

When an act signs to a major label it will have already developed a considerable number of relationships with 'external' agencies that help to sustain the act as a working entity. It is reasonable to allow that these relationships might bear on how the act understands the sound it makes; where it is positioned with regard to other acts; to the market for pop music; and to the likelihood that it will achieve

success. In this way, and in however restricted a role, there can be many more 'participants' in record-making than, strictly, the pop act and the record company. 'Success' and 'failure' are relative terms; before a contract is signed, every act will have survived different moments of failure and attained different types of success. Each act, therefore, is unique in a dual sense: firstly, it is made up of distinct individuals; but, secondly, it is unique in that its *history* is entirely its own. However, whether the constituent features of that history are equally unique is a matter for research and discussion. Before this point becomes more elliptical, (for the want of that 'research' and 'discussion'), it will be helpful to 'set the scene' in the manner indicated above - by establishing how many signed acts fail to attain mass sales.

Surveying new releases.

I decided to track the chart performance of singles released by major labels during one week in 1995 and to cross-reference the results with any evidence of album sales by the acts in question - either at the time of the release of the single or in the course of the calendar year. I took as my starting point for this brief survey the issue of 'Music Week' dated the fourth of February, 1995 ('Music Week' does not print volume or issue numbers). I chose to begin the survey with this issue because January is a 'slow' time for the record industry - it is the post-Christmas aftermath when the disposable income of most consumers is likely to be at its lowest. Instructively, the first issue in February also carries an analysis of market share, by company, for the last quarter of the previous year. Dynamically presented as a series of graphs in striking colours, this analysis breaks down market share by company, label and distributor in the form of bar charts and line-graphs. The text accompanying the graphs explains the process of the compilation of market performance statistics

with reference to the guidelines established by the 'Chart Supervisory Committee' - a committee of the British Phongraphic Institute (BPI) - and shows, not unsurprisingly, domination of the market by the major record companies, at that time Polygram, BMG, Sony, EMI and Warner. The headline, 'Polygram pulls clear in the market-share race' and the tall Polygram bar, at thirty-two percent more than double the share of its next nearest rival, BMG (thirteen percent) is, as is the intention, a graphic depiction of the 'health' of Polygram as a successful label. Although volume sales are not represented, there are references throughout the article to impressive sales figures and all of this information is used to justify the claim that 'the business (is) emerging decisively from recession'. But, crucially, what these figures do not indicate to either the casual reader, or even to an informed reader from within the music industry, is the *efficiency* of Polygram, BMG, Sony, and so on.

The 'Music Week' quarterly analysis shows that certain companies are selling records, are capable of competing in the market-place, which is perhaps a vital aspect (if not the defining aspect) of business efficiency; but what they do not reveal is the ratio between the number of releases and the number of hit records; neither do they show the 'condition' of the label's 'roster' of acts - how many acts had their records rejected by the company; how many are in contractual limbo; how many of the acts that are selling records are actually recouping outlay and investment? Understandably, no company wants this kind of information to become public knowledge and, while 'Music Week' is an effective trade journal, it tends only to deal with these issues in a *post hoc* way - by reporting on the sacking of key figures and hinting at the reasons for their dismissal with guarded references to 'the disappointing recent performance of the company'. Yet, from experience, the main topic for discussion within record companies is exactly this issue of the 'hidden' indices of the

performance of labels and companies and new staff recruits (almost always from other companies) come with tales of mismanagement and crisis at their former label with which to regale new colleagues. On this basis, testing the veracity of high failure rates can at least be addressed by comparing releases with hits; testing the accuracy of the ratio on an industry-wide level; and, more instructively, on a company-by-company basis, is far harder to accomplish.

If we return to the issue of tracking the chart performances of new releases then, in the edition of 'Music Week' in question, ninety-six singles were released during the week in question (two hundred and thirty-six albums were also released). Of the singles, eight were distributed by Polygram, which is not necessarily to argue that they were originated by Polygram or by one of its subsidiary labels but the likelihood remains that the majority would be - in fact, in this case, all the singles were releases on labels directly controlled by Polygram, among them A&M, Motown and Island. Of the other major companies, EMI distributed nine singles on seven labels (including Capitol, Parlophone, Chrysalis and Virgin); BMG distributed six on five labels (including RCA and the US-based major MCA which is usually counted as a major company in its own right but evidently lacks its own British distribution apparatus); Sony distributed nine singles on six labels (including Columbia and Epic); and Warner distributed seven singles on five labels (including Elektra, WEA, East West and Reprise). Of the total singles released during the week, thirty-seven percent were released by major companies. This may seem a comparatively small figure, but if we look more closely at the releases then the following can be observed:

(i). Of the remaining releases, the major distributors were Pinnacle who exist solely as a distributor of releases of minority, often tiny, independent ('indie rock') labels. This same observation then applies to SRD (thirteen titles distributed, almost

all House/garage/techno tracks); and Jetstar (thirteen titles on thirteen labels, predominantly reggae releases).

(ii). Releases on major labels distributed by major companies were, overwhelmingly, chart-oriented including several by established artists. In fact the release pattern was almost identical in each case - one release each by a major act; Gloria Estefan, Tom Petty, Sting, Annie Lennox and Del Amitri on Sony, Warner, EMI, BMG and Polygram, respectively - supported by a smattering of up-and-coming indie rock acts - Supergrass, P.J. Harvey; less-bankable former 'names' also in the 'indie rock' category - Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Smiths (a 'catalogue' release); hugely successful US acts that meant little in Britain - Live, Garth Brooks; and all supported by a large number of 'dance' acts; including some with a chart 'history' - C. and C. Music Factory, Marky Mark with others that were likely to be 'one-off' releases.

Frith makes the point in 'A Year of Singles in Britain' that, 'not all records are aimed at the charts' (Frith, 1975, p. 39) and he offers a compelling break-down ('compelling' in the sense that he made 'good guesses') about the likely reason for the release of particular singles. In 1972/3, two thousand, nine hundred and forty-one singles were released - an average of fifty-seven singles per week. In 1994, Five thousand one hundred and one singles were released - an average of ninety-eight singles a week, which makes the week of proposed new releases catalogued by 'Music Week' on the fourth of February (the sixth to the twelfth of February) absolutely typical in terms of the sheer number of releases. Overall, single releases were seventy-five percent greater than they were in 1972/3 and there was less evidence that singles were not 'aimed at the charts' although certain of Frith's observations continued to hold good (the Tom Petty, Annie Lennox releases would

fall into the category of 'album trailers; the reggae market apparently continues to survive on the odd chart hit so finely tuned are its releases to the capacity of its market). But, even without hard evidence, we can anticipate that the sheer volume of sales had changed the 'chances' of singles in the 1990's and, thereby, perhaps altered the rationale for their continued release.

Without entering into a fuller exploration of the changing status, and release strategies, for singles in contemporary Britain, the fact remains that day-time radio air-play policies (which still tend to concentrate on chart material) and the still limited opportunities for new music video broadcasting continue to make 'exposure' of new acts a problematic business for record companies. With so many more singles being released than was the case twenty-five years ago, this can only mean that more singles will fail in the market-place; while those that succeed in securing chart placings will be under continuous competition from high volumes of new releases and will, therefore, be likely to remain on the chart for fewer weeks than comparable single releases in the Nineteen Seventies. Certainly, many of the five thousand 1994 releases would have only registered as 'chart singles' because retailers are now guided by 'Music Week's' Top Seventy-Five rather than, say, 'Melody Maker's' Top Thirty as they might have been in the Seventies. Perhaps, in this sense, 'chart entry' is devalued; if not, a chart placing of somewhere between fifty and seventy-five is surely indicative of comparatively low sales (of which, more below). If we consider the different fates of the single releases in this brief survey (counting only those on major labels) the following can be observed:

(i). In the week after release, three of the singles entered the charts; two weeks later nineteen further singles charted. Twenty-two entries out of thirty-nine releases is a healthy eighty-six percent *'success'* rate and an initial reversal of the

eighty-seven percent failure rate of the 'rule-of-thumb' under consideration. The reason for the discrepancy between three and nineteen singles over two weeks will be, simply, that the three singles to chart first would have been released at the beginning of the week surveyed by 'Music Week' (it is also possible that they had already been available in 'special formats' a few days prior to 'official' release).

(ii). Once we begin to consider the length of time spent on the charts, the 'optimistic' picture above begins to darken. Of the twenty-two initial chart entries, four dropped out after one week; eight after two weeks; and three more after three weeks. By the eleventh of March only six singles remained on the charts and only two of them were in the top ten - 'Don't Give Me Your Life' by Alex Party on MCA but distributed by BMG; and 'No More I Love You's' by Annie Lennox, on RCA, also distributed by BMG. Of the other four, Sting's, 'Only a Cowboy Song' had peaked at fifteen for two weeks; while Gloria Estefan and Del Amitri had reached nineteen and twenty-one respectively, but had dropped several places every week thereafter.

(iii). Frith's 1975 observations on 'album trailers' tended to hold true for several of the singles that entered the chart, whatever the duration of their stay. For example, The Smith's 'Ask' appeared for one week only at sixty-two but this presaged the release of their entire back catalogue and exactly one month later there were six Smiths albums in the Top Fifty. The same applied to releases by Siouxsie and the Banshees; P.J. Harvey; John Lee Hooker; Garth Brooks; and Del Amitri. The singles by Sting and Gloria Estefan had been taken from already successful albums and the Annie Lennox record was part of the promotional build-up towards the release of 'Medusa'; a very successful album release in April.

If we take it as granted that most singles will be derived from album-projects (not all will be - dance singles are very often 'one-offs' by DJ's and mixers) and that

the major record companies will be looking for strong album sales to begin, in Negus's words, 'to recoup initial investment and begin to make money', then an examination of the connections between singles by new artists and subsequent successful album releases begins to change the picture quite dramatically. Just by linking chart entries with album sales we can reduce the number of 'successful' artists from twenty-two chart entrants to eleven acts - on the basis that eleven of the new entrants neither registered obvious 'hit' singles, top ten entry, nor registered as large-selling album acts later in the year; these were simply chart entries of brief duration and, probably, very limited sales. Of the eleven 'successes', Alex Party had a hit single that didn't spawn a major selling album; Sting and Gloria Estefan's tracks had been taken from already successful albums; the Smiths was a 'posthumous' release; Garth Brooks and John Lee Hooker sold to a very limited market (John Lee Hooker, especially, whose 'revival' was based largely on his appearance in a Budweiser commercial); the Siouxsie and the Banshees album charted only briefly; P. J. Harvey's album was her third and did not stay on the album chart for long; Annie Lennox released an album of covers as a follow-up to her hugely successful first solo album 'Diva'; while the Del Amitri album was a fair-sized hit but this from an act in the tenth year of its career.

Viewed through the particular lens of the connection between singles 'performance' and album sales, each of these 'successful' acts would be in a very different condition - some might still be climbing the 'spiral' of music industry success, while others might be on a downward course. For example, the fact that Del Amitri had a small hit single and that this helped album sales for a few weeks might not have been enough to secure them a subsequent album release; Annie Lennox's hit single, on the other hand, would have been encouraging for the company in the run-

up to the release of a follow-up to a hugely successful first album; Siouxsie and the Banshees record company might be very concerned that a long-established act's 'sales base' appeared so narrow; while John Lee Hooker's company would be pleased at the unexpected bonus of charting an album by a veteran bluesman. But what is more important for this study is that the only successful *new* act either to emerge from, or feature in, the entire list of thirty-nine releases by major labels during the week of the sixth to the twelfth of February was 'Supergrass' whose single 'Mansize Rooster' (their second) entered the chart at Twenty but lasted only two further weeks before dropping out. Later they scored a hit with 'Alright' and they were, consequently, one of EMI's successes of the year (their album, 'I Should Coco' was the thirty-first largest selling album of the year).

Suddenly, then, thirty-nine releases are reduced to one successful new act; not, of course, that the majors would not be pleased to sell records by all the other acts mentioned above, but record companies need continuously to look to the future, to the replacements for Sting and Gloria Estefan. To have found one Supergrass is a triumph, after Latin Quarter's 'Radio Africa' was a hit for Arista (and the song had been released previously on *two* independent labels) the company went for four years before they registered another hit single by a British signing. Major record companies are able to absorb huge losses in their search for successful acts; and the work of searching goes on relentlessly, as the figures here indicate - ninety-seven singles a week from five companies. But, if we allow that five thousand singles in a year does not mean five thousand separate acts, the scale of failure is still enormous - while Supergrass were gladdening the hearts of EMI employees, what became of Royal Trux and Dead-Eye Dick, released in the same week?

The last point above can be amplified if we consider the end of year statistics for 1995. A quarter of the One Hundred best selling singles of the year were by 'debut' acts; a reasonably 'healthy' figure; but only nine of the year's one hundred best selling albums was a debut release. Four of the top selling debut albums were 'novelty' releases - the huge selling 'Robson and Jerome' album (a TV tie-in from the programme 'Soldier, Soldier'); 'Sax Moods' and 'Pan Pipe Moods' (easy listening music) and the 'Riverdance' 'album of the show'. Of the others, one was by an American act, Foo Fighters, with the remainder being British signings to major companies (two on EMI; two on Polygram; and one on Sony). This is not to say that every other 'new signing' to a major label would be judged to have failed if its first singles or first album did not register in the respective top hundreds at the end of the year, but, crucially, without far more precise information on a label's roster; the extent of budgets; the commitment of staff, and so on (see below) the value of this kind of survey begins to break down.

Assessing the 'Quantitative' approach to 'Success' and 'Failure'.

The problem with the kind of speculation I make above (for example, with regard to the likely reception within companies of the chart performance of acts) is not that it may be less rather than more accurate or less rather than more informed; it is that it is only speculation and no more. 'Music Week' may well be the 'bible' of the music industry but it actually contains very little information of the kind that might illumine the day-to-day lives of acts signed to record labels. For example, it does not record sales figures, beyond indicating whether a single (or an album) has qualified for silver, gold or platinum status. Further, the publication of a list of singles set for release in the next week gives those records a deceptive sense of equivalence, rather

like the publication of a race card in the sports pages of a national newspaper; but there is no equality in the music industry; all contracts are separately negotiated and confidential and it is certain that no two acts will receive identical treatment from a record company. Obviously, we would expect records on major labels to have much larger promotional budgets than releases by independents, but it is very likely that budgets will vary considerably *within* companies, as a whole, and even within labels. Without access to this information we cannot gauge how the chart, and sales, performance of a record was received within the record company; for example, I assume, above, that Polygram would be disappointed with the Siouxsie and the Banshees record, they may not have been, the act may well have paid for the recording themselves. Without knowing the extent of the recording and the promotional budgets for a new act; or the extent of recoupable debt for an 'established' act, we cannot know the sales target figure for a release by that act. Without knowing the sales target figure, and with no access to actual numbers of records sold, we can't judge whether the act in question is regarded by their label as either succeeding or failing. Equally, and partly as a consequence of this, we have no way of knowing the condition and morale of the 'team' involved in the release of the record (discussed later, but the combination of key functionaries in record release and promotion) and of how their collective efforts (or lack of them) might be influencing determination inside the company to pursue an on-going sales campaign around a particular act. Further, we might read in 'Music Week' that an employee has left a company, but we have no way of knowing whether and how this departure might have affected acts that this person may have held key responsibility for. We might also read about changes in personnel and policy at a corporate level but, again, we have no way of tracking these changes to their effects on acts.

Taken together, then, it is possible to generate speculative evidence to support the claim that a large proportion of acts signed to major record companies are unsuccessful; but this type of evidence has severe limitations in terms of its usefulness. In the above instances, we have no way of determining whether or not the one-to-eight 'rule of thumb' is accurate because we have no information about the roster of acts signed to labels controlled by major record companies. If we knew who was signed, we could begin to gauge the proportion of successful acts to unsuccessful acts within companies. 'Music Week' does offer a cursory, weekly guide to new signings and, at the end of the year, will 'sum up' the 'key signings' on a label-by-label basis. By using this data it would be possible to keep track of the 'progress' of signings but, again, we would soon arrive at the limitations of this quantitative approach outlined above. Yet, to be concerned with a lack of comprehensive quantitative data is, largely, to miss the point about how the music industry works. However comprehensive it was, analysis of this kind of data could still never convey the 'life' of a major record company. Essentially, the type of data required to verify and to explain the high proportion of failed acts on major record labels will always be qualitative in kind; for the reason that definitions of 'success' and 'failure' are constantly shifting, not just as debts rise and income fails to keep step, but as personnel, and corporate policies, come and go. All acts want to 'make it'; and signing a 'deal' will always bring with it a sense of achievement; but signing is truly only 'the end of the beginning'. Whether the number of acts that sign to major record companies that actually go on to 'make it' fully - to enter mass consciousness and stay there for an appreciable period - is one to eight, or one to a hundred, is not the issue; the issue is that, for the majority of pop acts, 'signing a deal' is a ticket to failure and that 'destination' is often reached surprisingly quickly.

Conclusion.

The fact that failure, and large-scale failure at that, is an industry 'constant' should be a disturbing recognition not just for researchers but for all aspirant pop acts. That it tends not to be, in either case, is a product of the continuing, comparative obscurity of the business of making recorded music. That the major commentators on the general, industrial experience of making popular music are often reliant on 'rule-of-thumb' figures at key junctures in their respective arguments tells us much about how under-researched music industry practices still are; and if academics who live to research have unearthed so little, then we can only imagine what little 'hard' information is available to emergent pop acts on the conditions and demands they are likely to encounter in the business of progressing to the goal of making hit records.

One outcome of the 'lack of access' to the experience of making pop - through all its stages - referred to previously, is that this helps to reinforce stereotypes about cultural production that tend to deflect from its fundamental, profit-oriented nature. For example, 'Q' magazine (the most successful pop publication in Britain in the last decade) represented the business of recording in this way:

> Little is known of this twilight world, where an impenetrable language is spoken, body clocks are scrambled and the sound is 'proofed'. And yet its here, witnessed only by frowning operatives, installed behind enormous banks of implausibly complicated equipment, that musicians can often deliver their finest performances ... a rarely seen stage of Rock's creative process. Knob that flange back. Give it some reverse glissando phase down.
> ('Q' Magazine supplement).

This piece can be criticised in a variety of ways and from a range of perspectives but, for these purposes, what we can note is the confidence the editor's

have in the ignorance of their readership that they can patronise them in this way. Certainly, the style is tongue-in-cheek (it is also sycophantic) but the sub-text is one that advertises the 'intimacy' of the glimpse into 'rock's creative process' offered by the free photo supplement. But how can still images convey the process of making records; of transforming compositional ideas *into* compositions; and what can they tell of the multiple pressures these acts and their producers were under at the very moment the photographs were taken (and of how those pressures may have inflected compositional and commodification decisions)? What this kind of myth-making exercise achieves is the maintenance of an ideology of the ineffability of artistic creation; together with a mystification of the business of making records.

With no other sources of information on the music industry available to them (other than, perhaps, the usually cryptic reminiscences of local music industry casualties), new pop acts have little beyond the inaccuracies and glosses of the music press to inform their music-making activities, in the broadest sense. All pop acts that want to 'make it' (see Cohen, 1991) really do have to travel from 'the bedroom and the kitchen' to 'mass consciousness'; but each act is forced to 're-invent the wheel' in terms of its self-organisation and preparation for 'stardom' (where notions of 'stardom' can be very far removed from the realities of life on a record label). Viewed in this way, it should not be surprising that, while many acts set out on the journey few arrive; or that fewer still remain in the consciousness of the mass for any great length of time.

If we accept that a predominantly quantitative approach to record-making is inadequate to the task of representing the qualitative nature of the practical activity of individuals whose job it is to convert the music and identities of acts that are signed to major record companies into popular music products; then, it is my intention,

firstly, to establish what writers on the music industry have had to say about these 'individuals' and their working methods and practices. I then intend to examine the experience of three acts, Respect, Roadhouse and Latin Quarter, that met with different types of 'failure' on major record labels. In this examination I will concentrate on how the evolution of the act affected interactions within itself; and between its representatives and those record company employees and other significant individuals involved in the recording and promotional processes. I do this with the aim of attempting to answer the primary question of why it is that so many signed acts fail to make hit records - but always in terms of the two supplementary questions that ask whether, and in what ways, a commonality of experience might exist to explain the fate of failed pop acts.

This examination will need to be prefaced not just by a further, more detailed, statement of my research methods but by an exploration of my position as researcher, for the reason that I am far 'closer' to some of my research material than is normally the case in an exercise of this kind. Finally, I hope to draw some conclusions about how researchers might approach the territory of determining why it is that so many acts fail to achieve what they have every right to expect to achieve on signing to a major record company - if not success, then at least a very good shot at it.

Chapter Two:

Making Records and Making Commodities:

a Range of Views.

Introduction.

The main work of the previous chapter was the identification of a little researched and little regarded cultural phenomenon: that, viewed from the experience of pop acts signed to major record labels, the main product of the music industry is not success, but failure. Various estimates of the extent of this failure were considered and, while it could not be finally verified, the 'rule of thumb' figure that, for every eight acts signed to major record labels, only one will succeed, gives some indication of how rare success in popular music really is. What we need to appreciate, before beginning to examine this phenomenon more closely, is that, to make such an observation flies in the face, firstly, of 'the facts'; when these are understood as the extremely healthy balance sheets of the major companies. For example, as 'Music Week' reported, in mid-1995 EMI Music Group 'announced its seventh consecutive record results ... with turnover up 24% to £2.2 Billion and profits up 20% to £294.9 million': "failure" is not a word a major company would readily or recently recognise. Secondly, this way of representing the experience of making popular music not only flies in the face of how most consumers experience pop; which is to say, vicariously, as their favourites enjoy the glamour of international stardom; but it also strikes at the very heart of the notion of 'popular' music itself - to re-echo Frith, popular music is recorded music that enters 'mass consciousness', music that is made with this

intention but that fails to realise its goal may, stylistically, be pop, but it is never fully-realised as such because it fails to sell. From whatever angle we approach it, as sound, statistic or thrill, pop music always dazzles us with the enormity of its success rather than dismays us with the vastness of its failure.

Before exploring the record-making experiences of three acts who were signed to major labels but who failed to make hit records, and, further, as a springboard for establishing a method towards that exploration, we need to consider what analyses of the relations that exist between pop acts and major labels have so far been made. Popular Music Studies (PMS) as a distinct discipline (or as an inter-disciplinary area) is still in its infancy. Even so, Richard Middleton was able to observe in 1990 that 'a comprehensive bibliography of popular music .. would require a book to itself' (Middleton, 1990, p. 297). Popular music is, then, much written about but its study is only now beginning to be systematised. As observations in the previous chapter made clear, there are important socio-historical reasons for this gulf between wider social interest and enjoyment in pop and its academic study, and the particular consequences of this disjuncture tends, still, to define the field of study.
Very schematically, the literature that attempts to theorise the development of pop music can be argued to have passed through four phases:

1. 1890-1940. If we take pop music to be one of the cultural responses to the rise of the mass urban populations of the end of the Nineteenth Century, then, between 1890 and 1940, no substantial attempt was made to discuss or analyse it as a new cultural phenomenon; excepting the work of Issac Goldberg who furnished a well-researched account of the rise and practices of 'Tin Pan Alley' song-writers and publishers during the first three decades of the century (Goldberg, 1961). Pop was not brought inside the academy, its only place was as evidence of the worthlessness of

popular products in debates that contrasted the debasement of culture through the rise of cultural industrial products and a mass market for Hollywood films, popular newspapers and magazines, cheap novels, and dance music. This contempt for 'mass culture', articulated most completely in the pages of 'Scrutiny' (1932-53), the mouthpiece of the Leavis's, has continued to exert an influence in the Universities and other elite institutions ever since. What compounded the issue, and gave a cast to debates about pop that those who argue its serious study have yet to escape, was that a far more thorough critique and condemnation of cultural industrial production, and of pop music especially, came from within Marxism, ostensibly the polar opposition to the elitism of the influential 'Scrutiny' group. In sum, in the opinion of the 'Mass Culturalists', the commodification of creativity was a debasement of the creative act.

2. 1940-1970. In 1941, Theodor Adorno published his essay 'On Popular Music'. It would be wrong to imagine that this essay somehow 'contributed' to or even 'founded' Popular Music Studies. In the first instance, there was no PMS to 'contribute' to; in the second, not only did Adorno's work fit easily into a 'Mass Culturalist' frame of reference (therefore one entirely unsympathetic to pop and, presumably, to its study), but it tended to be other aspects of Adorno's work, particularly on Television, that were absorbed into the US academic mainstream during the expansion of interest in Mass Communications and Media Studies in the 1950's. It was not until the late-60's that the work of Adorno, as a member of the 'Frankfurt School' (the school of critical Marxism founded in 1923, and forced to re-locate to the USA by the rise of Nazism), together with the work of 'dissident' Marxists from a variety of countries and historical periods, became generally available for close-reading and discussion inside the resurgent British Left. When young pop enthusiasts began to theorise the cultural position of pop, and especially of

Rock music, they formulated that theorisation through an engagement with what radical texts were available. Adorno's (impeccably Marxist) condemnation was a bitter pill to swallow and the most rigorous work in early, British PMS engages with Adorno in the development of a theoretical legitimation of the study of popular music. We will need to return to Adorno's specific criticisms of popular music, below; but, to précis his case, the commodification of creativity is not only a debasement of creativity, it is politically pernicious because it contributes to the passivity and the ideological enslavement of the mass of the population.

3. 1970-1985. From the end of the Sixties through, very roughly, to the mid-Eighties, PMS issued, principally, from the fount of Rock journalism. This is not entirely true of US research into pop - where the Mass Communications tradition 'permitted' the study of popular music - but this tended to limit theorisation either to Functionalist or Quantitative approaches, as the work of Hirsch 1972, Peterson and Berger 1975, and others, testifies. PMS, in this country (and also, despite the fore-going, in the USA as well), grew largely as a result of the efforts of individuals who had their roots in the Rock journalism of the period but who also intersected with academia in different ways, and at different times; individuals who were committed to the idea that pop music was a valuable area of study. This, originally and understandably, was not a large group. Central among them were Simon Frith, Charlie Gillett and Dave Laing who not only produced some of the first, book-length analyses of aspects of popular music-making, but who also collaborated on magazines like 'Let it Rock' and the 'Rock File' series of paperbacks. Graham Vulliamy and Edward Lee wrote extensively on pop's place in the school curriculum, while academics like Richard Middleton and David Horn helped connect these initiatives with the work of a tiny handful of older, mainly musicologists, who had

pioneered the embrace of non-classical musical forms within that discipline - Wilfred Mellers and Charles Hamm, for example.

From the beginning, and given Rock's American origins (and African and European roots), there was an international dimension to reflective journalism and to the emergent Rock scholarship. This crystallised in the formation of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) in the early-Eighties. Again, it is very schematic to present this as a unified 'movement' when it contains large numbers of people working in different fields who employed different methodologies for different ends; even so, the formation of IASPM does indicate a willingness to *connect;* and the spirit of that connection was a undoubtedly informed by the 'communalism' of the Rock years and by a shared determination that pop be treated seriously by academia. Seen in this light, while the contest with Adorno in the theorisation of pop can be argued to have elevated certain concerns above others, this nonetheless demanded a rigour that simple journalism could not (had no need to) deliver. Very generally, the Rock tradition tended to agree with Adorno that the commodification of (musical) creativity was pernicious, but made an exception of Rock for a variety of reasons. The work of Laing (1969) and Frith (1978) is notable in all of this for their (separately and differently argued) determination to avoid the simple assertion of Rock's 'difference' from pop. In their hands, the value of the study of popular music needed to be demonstrable and consistent and, in this, the 'inconvenient' fact of Rock's commodification needed to be confronted and surmounted.

4. 1985-Present. As Marxism lost the academic centrality it had gained in the Social Sciences during the expansion in Higher Education provision in the 1960's, new modes of understanding challenged Marxism's deterministic tendencies and its

blindness to oppressions other than the politico-economic. In short, the rise of post-Marxist critique (and its coincidence with the decline of the certainties of Rock Music and the Rock 'community') has opened the study of pop to new theoretical systems. Amongst these, the legacy of the Rock tradition's concern with the conditions of popular music production has not been lost; but new ways of analysing the uses made of popular music have broadened the debate about the issue of the commodification of popular cultural products and have found new grounds to argue the value of pop production and pop consumption.

All that such a very general sweep through popular music research really tells us is that, since roughly the late-1960's, some theorists have been determined to take pop music 'seriously', but 'taking pop seriously' means taking an entire form of cultural expression 'seriously'. Given the academy's resistance to the study of pop, what this has meant is that research opportunities into pop production and pop consumption have been extremely limited. Frith makes this point in British Popular Music Research (1981) and, despite progressive changes in the status of popular music research in the intervening years, there is still 'much to do' with regard to researching this field. Consequently, when we narrow our focus to consider only those texts that deal with how pop is produced, then what complicates the issue is that, not only are these few, but the studies themselves are not simply 'dedicated' studies of popular music production. Instead, the principal studies of record company practices exist as studies of wider aspects of the cultural and social place of popular music written in different eras and from different theoretical perspectives.

To consider, firstly, the more general implications of this last point above: to make a pop record is to produce a musical-cultural artefact through the agency of the record industry. As previous remarks have indicated, unlike other areas of cultural

production, the study of popular music is divided between disciplines in a way that limits full communication between contributing theorists. In broad terms, the study of Popular Music is divided between Sociology and Musicology. Because sociologists make assumptions about what musicians do from their reading of how the industry works, they have great difficulty in explaining how musical practices connect with industrial practices. The reverse is then true of musicologists; the latter make claims about music made for major record companies as if industrial practices have no significance for the fates of composers and performers (post-modernists ignore both and elevate consumption over production). Understood in this way, to study popular music is at once to study music-making, to study cultural, industrial production and to study the cultural place of the consumption of popular musical products. Theorists of popular music-making are, thus, divided not simply by different theoretical perspectives within each constituent area of study, they are divided by fundamental differences of discourse *between* those areas. This is not to say that attempts are not made to 'bridge the gaps' but, as yet, no truly common ground exists between theorists of 'text' (musicologists) and theorists of 'context' (sociologists). On this basis, PMS is 'co-disciplinary' rather than 'inter disciplinary'. Further, even where theorists share a common interest (and, to a degree, common perspectives and related discourses), the long-term academic disdain for pop music has, to an extent, distorted the course of inquiry in the sense that earlier theorists have exhibited a tendency to make a general case for or against pop music as a context for whatever aspect of pop production or consumption that concerns them most. This is an additional, complicating feature in any review of popular music literature.

In the recent past, Longhurst in Popular Music and Society (1995) has supplied a convincing general overview of the academic study of popular music. As

the title of the work suggests, his main concern is with sociological theories of popular music-making (although he does provide an introduction to musicological accounts of pop, as well). Similarly, although from a much narrower focus, Laing (1994) and Hesmondhalgh (1996) have both furnished recent accounts of the trajectory taken by non-musicological studies of pop. More than this, these latter two have concentrated on summarising the development of the debate on the relationship between popular music-making and the industrial production of pop records. At the risk of making an amalgam of these texts, a similar 'line of march' for this aspect of the study of popular music is discernible in each study: Adorno's essay of 1941, On Popular Music, is collectively cited as the 'point of departure' (this is also true of Middleton's 1990 comprehensive, musicologically-informed work as well). Following this, the next most significant text is Hirsch's from 1972 - where the lengthy gap is eloquent of academia's disdain for popular musical products. Frith's, 1978 work, The Sociology of Rock (together with his updated version, Sound Effects, 1983) is next in line and the publication, in 1992, of Keith Negus's Producing Pop brings us up-to-date. There are various parallels and over-laps, as well as oppositions, between these four works and these will be discussed below; here we need to consider how this study requires, simultaneously, to refer to these 'foundational' texts, and also to be distanced from them.

Essentially, each of the above theorists has a wider object in view than 'simply' the study of how records are made: Adorno wanted to castigate popular culture; Hirsch to apply Functionalist Organisational Theory to a novel area of production; Frith to 'rescue' pop from Adorno's condemnation; and Negus to posit the rise of a 'global' mass entertainment industry. As Longhurst, Laing and Hesmondhalgh all, separately, indicate, there is a wider literature on the record

industry than is represented by these four works. Of particular interest to me are the works of Hennion (1983/ 1990) and of Stokes (1977) (see below), but the problem, from the perspective of this research, with much of this other work on the record industry, is that it is either quantitative (Ryan 1985, Lopes 1992, Christianen 1994), didactic (Harker 1980, Chapple and Garafalo 1977), or sensationalist (Dannen 1990, Knoedelseder 1993). This does not mean that none of these works is interesting or that no further texts exist that can shed light on different aspects of record-making - Stratton (1982a, 1982b, 1983) Gronow (1983), Harron (1988), and Jones (1992), among still others, have all furnished useful analyses of specific dimensions of the record-making process - but Hirsch, Frith and Negus all offer comprehensive overviews of record-making in ways that other theorists do not. It is for this reason that we encountered their work early in this analysis - to the extent that, largely, it is their differential under-development of the identification of the high failure rate of signed pop acts that has led us thus far. Adorno demands inclusion because his work provided a point of departure for the more academically-inclined Rock theorists of the late-60's.

An overview of record company relations with pop acts cannot be achieved simply by 'touring' a 'typical' record company and pointing out that it is the work of one department to sign acts and of others to market, promote and sell those acts and their products as commodities. What both 'Quantitative' studies and 'hostile' studies of the record industry lack is a sense of the place of the pop act in the industrial equation. While this dimension will also be argued to be insufficiently addressed in the work of the four theorists in question, their work might still be jointly understood as, variously mounted but deliberate, attempts to examine how record-making is pursued (rather than either how 'bad' record companies can be or how relations

between individual record companies have changed). Because popular music-making is a form of popular culture, there are, clearly, multiple issues to consider in the reproduction, for sale, of popular musical items. On this basis, where necessary, the work of other theorists will be drawn on in the course of this discussion, but the four theorists in question remain those most closely associated with systematic study of music industry practices.

Assessing the Industrial Production of Popular Music - preconditions:

Before we begin to look more closely at the work of Adorno, Hirsch, Frith and Negus, the following points need to be borne *in mind*:

1. In the previous chapter, the assertion was made that we might be likely to gain new insights into popular music-making, firstly, by approaching the industrial process of the commodification of music from the point of view of the experience of pop acts; and, secondly, by allowing that the analysis of the very high failure rate amongst signed pop acts might equally produce new understandings of how popular music is made. In both instances we need to remember that 'overproduction' already exists as an explanation for the high failure rate amongst signed pop acts, and also that isolating the production of pop from its consumption might produce its own flaws.

In response to the issue of 'overproduction', I think it futile to deny that overproduction, if it is not the root, structural 'cause' of failure, as such (if it was, then all acts would be equally prone to failure), then it is still the context of failure (not everyone can succeed, can make 'hit' records). This is the true worth of 'Quantitative' studies of the record industry; they can show quite clearly that, every week, there are too many records chasing not too few consumers but too few chart positions. The

point here is that, even if all consumers bought four records a week instead of one record occasionally, chart positions would still be both consumers' and record companies' measure of success. On this basis, it is likely that, even if the volume of sales goes up for individual records, their rank ordering will still cause consumers to consider low or non-entrants, failures. Arguably, even if a 'failure' under these conditions of high volume sales sells fifty thousand records rather than fifteen hundred or less as they may do today (which would mean that the record company might recoup its costs), the company might still seek to replace the act that made the record with one they hope will sell whatever the volume of sales it takes to reach number one in the sales chart. What concerns me is that the 'simple' recognition of over-production *at the level of the record industry as a whole* cannot account for why failure happens in individual cases.

2. As to the issue of an emphasis on production rather than consumption then certainly we will need to remain aware that when we buy a record by a pop act, we buy more than a sound fixed to a carrying format; what we buy is a commodified *experience* of the act that made that record. We buy not only the sound they make, we buy with it the experience of how they look, what their 'story' is and we buy into where they are placed culturally - so the purchase says something about us, about our tastes, about who we think we are (Hesmondhalgh quotes Garnham's reference to this dimension of cultural commodity consumption in terms of their indirect rather than direct use-value as 'markers of position and difference' - Hesmondhalgh, 1996 p. 481). Negus is concerned that we recognise that what the record industry now sells is a 'total star text' (see below) - we don't simply buy a Madonna record, we buy, almost, a memento, our 'piece' of 'Madonna, the star', and we display our

identification with her and with what we imagine she represents through our purchase of a copy of her latest work.

Although an exploration of consumption is beyond the scope of this study, it is fair to assert that the decisions that record companies make about what acts to commodify and how to sell the resultant commodities are related entirely to the expectation that a market of consumers exists, or can be created, for those commodities or commodified acts. In attempting to realise their expectation that an act can be transformed into a successful commodity, the record company will, simultaneously, be involved in the creation of a market for their commodity and a commodity for the market they are attempting to create. Seen in this way, the conditions of success are as much a part of *preparation* for the market-place as performance within it, and, as we have seen, the majority of signed acts 'fail' *on their way to market* rather than, strictly, within the market-place itself. This is the phenomenon that forms the object of this study.

3. Before we begin to discuss the work of these theorists (together with that of Adorno) in any greater detail, we need, firstly, to dispel any notion that there is some kind of equivalence among them. For example, the work of Hirsch's quoted in this context is an excerpted version of an essay published in 1972; the work of Frith's that I will pay most attention to (The Sociology of Rock) was published in 1978. In contrast, Negus's book, Producing Pop appeared as recently as 1992. Not only, then, are we considering different 'types' of text - essays and books, written with different objects of analysis and from different research perspectives; we are also, arguably, considering three different 'record industries' - the US record industry of the late-1960's; the British industry of the mid-1970's; and the 'global' industry of the early-1990's. Clearly, we are forced, not just by these differences in the relevant secondary

source material, but by the task in hand, to work at a high level of generality and abstraction if we are to identify consistent features of record company practice, particularly over such great distances in time and between foci of economic activity.

I begin this consideration of studies of the record industry with the work of Hirsch rather than with that of Adorno, for reasons that will be made clear in the course of the discussion of Hirsch's work. The work of Frith and of Negus will, then, occupy separate chapters.

Part One:

Hirsch.

Introduction.

The title of Hirsch's essay, Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organisation-Set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems tells us much about its thrust: that cultural industries are made up of organisations that 'process' products in response to (or perhaps to help create) 'fads and fashions'. In making even this fairly tame re-statement of the essay's title, the number of analytical pathways beckoning us is quite daunting. For example, from the latter half of the title we might be encouraged to begin with a definition of culture and an analysis of cultural expression; or we might start from the rise of industry and trace the connections between an industrial economy and the commodification of cultural expression. Conversely, if we isolated the first half of the essay's title, we would enter the sphere of consumption rather than production and, perhaps, be tempted to discuss the creation of markets or audiences for popular products and the connections between their consumption (and

production) and the various expressions of youth culture and their connections with popular music. All of these topics will be familiar both from the literature on Pop and from the wider literature of Media Studies and Cultural Studies. In an effort to contain the potential for distraction in order to keep the question of the roots and processes of the failure of signed pop acts in view, I want to concentrate on what made Hirsch's study so distinctive - the notion of 'organisation-set analysis' and of how this can be articulated through, and helps articulate, a discussion of record company practices. This, in turn, will help clarify his particular identification of the roots of large-scale failure in the pursuit of 'overproduction' as a deliberate entrepreneurial strategy.

The value of Hirsch's study (and also the source of controversy in its analysis) is not that he was the first theorist to draw attention to the consequences of the industrial production of cultural goods (Adorno did this and we will need to consider his work at greater length); rather, Hirsch's was the first to attempt to specify the organisational methods of cultural producers. Frith tends to conflict with Hirsch because of the 'trivialisation' of the audience for pop that 'fads and fashions' seem to suggest (although Frith doesn't articulate this, his main struggle is with Adorno); Negus, on the other hand, argues exactly against Hirsch's portrayal of these 'organisational methods'. Even so, as the first writer to truly broach the close study of the field, Hirsch's characterisation of the business of record companies as a system for creating cultural products or commodities is still of enormous importance.

Hirsch's distinction between 'cultural' and 'utilitarian' products focuses the rest of this discussion and is worth quoting at some length.

> Cultural products may be defined tentatively as "nonmaterial" goods directed at a public of consumers, for whom they generally serve an aesthetic or expressive rather than a clearly utilitarian function.. Records .. are predominantly cultural products .. non-material in that (they embody) a live, one-of-a-kind performance.. The term "cultural organisation" refers here only to *profit-seeking firms producing cultural products for national distribution.* (italics in the original. (Hirsch, 1990, pp 127/8).

Before going on to consider how Hirsch describes the working methods of 'cultural organisations' as 'profit-seeking firms', it is worth examining how, by using a quotation from Toffler, Hirsch specifies the core-work of a record company:

> .. the record manufacturer .. sells what appears to be a performance. But it is not. It is a replica of a performance, a mass-produced embodiment of a performance.. The book publisher, in effect, does the same. The original manuscript of the poem or novel represents the author's work of art, the individual, the prototype. The book in which it is subsequently embodied is a (manufactured) (sic) replica of the original. (Hirsch, 1990, p. 128)

In using this quote to help him build his case, Hirsch, instead, undermines his case. This observation will be developed below; here we need to specify the salient features of the 'case' that Hirsch makes:

1. Some types of 'artists' make works of culture that are capable of 'mass reproduction'; cultural organisations have evolved distinct methods both for signing 'art objects' for mass reproduction and for taking these, as cultural products, to market.

2. The work of the 'cultural industry system' is, on the above basis, to filter 'new products and ideas as they flow from "creative" personnel'.

3. 'Artists' compete with each other for the attention of the 'entrepreneurial organisation'. The 'art objects' they produce must then compete with others to gain, through 'mass media coverage', the attention of the mass audience.

4. The role the mass media play in relation to 'art objects' is that of 'gatekeeping'.

5. A novel and productive way to analyse organisations within the 'cultural industry system' is to consider not how they integrate with the social system but more how their 'goals may be constrained by society'. In this,

> The organisation is assumed to act under norms of rationality, and the subjects of analysis becomes its forms of adaptation to constraints imposed by its technology and "task environment". (Hirsch, 1990, p.128)

6. Record companies have two 'boundaries': input (product selection) and output (marketing). At the 'input' boundary 'talent scouts' operate with the sole purpose of selecting 'cultural products for organisational sponsorship and promotion'. These 'talent scouts' have a high degree of autonomy; they are separated professionally from the 'administrators' or the 'technical and managerial levels of the company'. The latter set 'budgetary limits' but, and distinctively, 'contracted artists and talent scouts are *delegated* (sic) the responsibility of producing marketable creations' with the result that, 'administrators are forced to trust the professional judgement of their employees'.

7. This system of production can be described as 'craft administration of production', where production is organised along 'craft rather than bureaucratic lines', distinguished particularly by the 'minimisation of fixed overhead costs' - artists are contracted and not directly employed; their earnings are not guaranteed but devolve from royalties.

8. This system of production is favoured because demand is uncertain. Demand uncertainty stems from the fact that 'consumer taste preferences' are volatile and mass media gatekeeping decisions are not controllable.

9. At the output 'boundary', organisational practices are more bureaucratic because promotion and distribution systems need to be organised systematically in order to minimise uncertainty.

10. The Mass Media wield considerable autonomous power. They function as 'institutional regulators of innovation'. Cultural producing organisations are responsive to the 'taste' decisions of media 'gatekeepers' and will reproduce similar materials 'until the fad has run its course'.

11. Because the Media have the power to 'regulate innovation' (by allowing only certain products through to the mass audience); and because cultural industrial organisations have the power to choose to mass reproduce the work of artists, the consumer is forced to choose from 'cultural styles and items "preselected" for consideration by 'role occupants in the managerial and institutional subsystems'. Even so, that consumers still exercise choice, if only from a preselected range of products, means that both the producers and the disseminators (organisations and media) will be responsive to consumer 'voting' by promoting some styles (and artists) and dropping others.

12. Cultural industrial organisations seek to evade the penalties of their particular 'task environments' (conditions at their two boundaries) by implementing three distinct, 'proactive' strategies:

> (1) The allocation of numerous personnel to boundary-spanning roles; (2) overproduction and differential promotion of new items; and (3) co-optation of mass media gatekeepers. (Hirsch, 1990, p.133)

13. As the previous chapter noted, Hirsch characterised overproduction as 'a rational organisational response in an environment of low capital investment and demand uncertainty'. These twin conditions give rise to the inescapable fact that the 'number of .. records .. released annually far exceeds .. consumer demand for these products'; from which it is reasonable to conclude that 'it is apparently more efficient to produce many "failures" for each success'.

14. Very few record releases enjoy 'large-scale' promotion. Companies 'rank order' releases in order to draw the attention of media gatekeepers to selected products. If these fail, 'substitutes' can be drawn from under-promoted items.

Evaluating Hirsch.

The problem with isolating a single piece of research and then deconstructing it, the better to construct some other analytical model for some other purpose, is that this will always give that piece a status and prominence within a much wider body of literature that, perhaps, might not be justifiable. My reason for beginning with Hirsch's essay and not, say, with Adorno's 'On Popular Music' (which also explores popular music-making as cultural industrial production) flows not just from his recognition of the large-scale failure of pop records (and with them, although unmentioned, pop acts) but from his attempt to specify failure as systemic. In this novel attempt, Hirsch contributes a number of new insights to the study of record production; and, further, he makes a number of applications of what were then quite new theories of media production to the specifics of cultural production in the music industry. Not only, uniquely, does he tie 'Overproduction' to a clear analysis of the 'Filter System' of record production; he also specifies how the 'input' stage of production can be characterised as 'craft administration' (a key aspect of record-

making that Adorno only asserted was the case) and shows how the 'output' stage culminates in consumer choice of 'pre-selected' material in a way that is less emotive than Adorno's 'pre-digestion' but also more concretely displayed. If we add to this list his challenging recognition of the components of 'demand uncertainty' and the centrality of his application of media 'gate-keeping' in this, Hirsch's essay could fairly be said to be 'seminal' in the development of the systematic study of Popular Music.

Again, because Hirsch's essay introduces new concepts about cultural industrial production and consumption and applies what were then very new ideas about how the mass media work, he tends to present music-making and music consumption as an unbroken, and quite rational, 'chain' - 'artists and mass audience are linked by an ordered sequence of events'. This 'chain' stretches from ideas in the imagination of composers to ideas in the consumer's imagination (the 'nonmaterial goods' that serve 'aesthetic or expressive' functions). This is not to suggest that there is no energy, no human activity, in the forging of the 'links' of this chain - there are 'artists; 'talent scouts'; wily executives who release enough product to outwit wily media 'gate-keepers'; and consumers who, at least, 'rank order' 'pre-selected' cultural products. Even so, Hirsch's account is 'bloodless'; it is the work of a functionalist whose only concern is with how a record company 'functions' as a cultural industrial organisation. Once more, there are connections here with the work of Adorno. It is still the case that, to begin to look more closely at Adorno would be tangential, at this point; but if Adorno was angered by what he considered to be the passivity of the 'mass audience', Hirsch remains unmoved. The condition of the audience and their use of pop is not his concern. This, I will argue, is a further flaw in his argument.

Despite its measured pace and precise connecting of postulates, there tend to be, in the course of the essay, changes in vocabulary and expression that have the

effect of considerably clouding the objects of study. Hirsch tends to 're-position' creators, creativity and the created in the development of his argument; this re-positioning, in turn, makes 'bloodless' what is, in fact, a series of intense, conflicting and over-lapping interactions between pop acts and record companies in the course of record-making. Although we need to appreciate that Hirsch's focus was not solely record-making (he simultaneously considers film and book production), and that some conflicts around changes in vocabulary might stem from his need to move between particular and general, it remains the case that, by specifying who produces what, differently, at different stages of his argument, Hirsch presents a contradictory account of record-making.

For example, at one stage in the essay, cultural organisations are said to choose from a range of 'art objects' produced by artists. These 'art objects' then become 'cultural products'; and one form of cultural product is the pop record. This account fits with the quote Hirsch takes from Toffler, in which a distinction is drawn between the consumption of a 'performance' and the consumption of 'a replica of performance, a mass-produced embodiment of a performance'. In this account of pop music-making, the pop act is artistically autonomous; and the record company is, simply, the manufacturer of copies of an 'art object'. But there is a confusion here, and also a contradiction with other representations that Hirsch makes of the role of the record company and its relationship with 'art objects'. In these 'other representations', records begin as 'raw material' (as 'singers' not even as songs) and become 'products' or 'commodities' under 'supervision'; or they begin as 'cultural innovations' and end as 'fads'; or, even, they begin as 'cultural items' and end as 'cultural items'. Such is the importance that the contradictions inherent in this

portrayal have for the further development of this study, as a whole, that I propose to identify them as a series of numbered points.

1. Even by Hirsch's own account, record companies do more than make 'replicas' of 'performances'. As he notes, 'contracted artists and talent scouts are *delegated* (his italics) the responsibility of producing marketable creations, with little or no interference from the front office beyond the setting of budgetary limits'.

What is novel in this analysis is that, through it, Hirsch identifies record-making (and cultural production in general) as distinct in its organisational methods from manufacturing industries. It is important that this distinction is made and, largely, Hirsch is accurate in specifying where the distinction, or one crucial aspect of the distinction, lies. By separating company executives (by which he means, effectively, the board of directors who administer the company on behalf of share-holders) from 'technical personnel'; and by demonstrating that these technical personnel (or 'contact men', never women) must be allowed considerably autonomy in their search for 'creative raw material', Hirsch sums up the typical division of responsibility within a record company. Put simply, the managing director in any 'territory' (major record companies operate 'globally' at least to the extent that they have offices in all of the countries in which people are able to buy pop records in large quantities) is appointed by the higher echelons of the company to assemble a team of A&R personnel (the 'contact men' in Hirsch's parlance, that sign acts); Marketing personnel (to prepare the acts and their material for mass marketing); and Promotions personnel (to take the act and its records to the media, and to the market by any other routes). If this 'team' works (i.e. has hit records that lead to profit-generation) then everyone keeps their job; if not, people are sacked; if particularly successful, people move on to better jobs - Hirsch doesn't go into this detail, but all

this is implied. The difficulty arises when we look more closely still at what this 'team' of 'contact men' does in relationship to the raw material they bring to the company; and to how this connects with Hirsch's observation that it is the *joint* responsibility of 'artists and talent scouts' to produce 'marketable creations'.

2. Hirsch represents consumption in this way:

> Feedback from consumers, in the form of sales figures .. cues producers and disseminators of cultural innovations as to which experiments may be imitated profitably and which should probably be dropped. This process is analogous to the preselection of electoral candidates by political parties, followed by voter feedback at the ballot box. The orderly sequence of events and the possibility of only two outcomes at each checkpoint resemble a Markov process. (Hirsch, 1990, p.133)

Again, this is abstraction at its most extreme; it is an arid account of pop consumption and enjoyment. But is it accurate? A 'Markov Process' is a stochastic one: the next step in the process depends only on the current condition of the process, not on any cumulative momentum. As Hirsch puts it,

> no product can enter the societal subsystem (e.g. retail outlets) until it has been processed favourably through each of the preceding levels of organisation, respectively. .. This model assumes a surplus of available "raw material" at the outset .. and pinpoints a number of strategic checkpoints at which the oversupply is filtered out. (Hirsch, 1990, p.133)

This is the heart of his argument (and it is exactly where Negus focuses his critique). My criticisms parallel Negus's but with a key difference (as we shall see); here what needs to be realised is that Hirsch invokes a dynamic process that is *continuous* - 'contracted artists and talent scouts are delegated the responsibility of producing marketable creations' - which he re-presents as a Markov one - 'no product can enter(the next stage) .. until it has been processed favourably'. The issue is that

Hirsch *suggests* a collaborative process (between 'contact men' and 'artists') but then refuses the conclusion that the consequences of such collaboration - which, reasonably, can range from the very positive to the very negative - will come to bear on the condition of the product at any stage of its existence; for what is 'checked' at the 'checkpoints' is the condition of the 'art-object-transformed', not whether the original performance is still likely to engage the attention of an audience bound to 'fads and fashions'.

To put it another way, a song or 'art object' does not pass through a simple process of replication. It appeals to 'common sense' to imagine some 'artists' being chosen over others to enter the replication process; and it is similarly appealing to imagine only some of the 'chosen' gaining success. But these appeals can only be sustained if we reduce record-making to, exactly, a sterile process of replication; 'sterile' in the sense that the process has no impact on the product. As soon as we admit that the process involves collaboration between processors and the processed then the impact of the former on the latter is identified as a constant structural feature of the business of record-making. In this version, what the consumer is offered is not the inviolate, replicated 'art object', but the total of all the process interactions and decisions that the art object together with the artist have experienced and under-gone on the way to the consumer's attention. On this basis, it is simply not the case that the product stands or falls on its merits at each 'level of organisation' as if the preceding levels had no bearing on its condition. Further, what is consumed is not (or, at least, is not *necessarily*) the 'art object' as intended by the pop act; but the industrial product, the commodity, that has emerged out of the shared need of acts to contract to record companies in order to reach the mass market; and the record companies need for new products to sell in the mass market to generate profit. Ultimately, we

must search for the roots of the mass failure of signed pop acts in the difference, identified previously, between the *replication* of 'art-objects' (songs, compositions, musical texts) and the *transformation* of acts and their texts.

Hirsch tends, conceptually, to avoid the conflict identified above, by his characterisation (after Stinchcombe) of the cultural-industrial organisational system as 'craft administration of production'. Again, this appeals to 'common sense': pop acts are not the direct employees of record companies; they begin their creative life outside of any direct connection with a record company and they appear to control the conditions of their production, at least within the scope of the schedules and budgetary limitations of the recording process. Further, they are not salaried by record companies; as Hirsch argues, they tend to bear the risk of their occupation by agreeing a royalty on the sale of replicas of their performances; or on the public broadcast of those replicated performances. The question remains, though, whether this is evidence of a 'craft' mode of production, in which 'artists' work on 'art objects' and have autonomy over the production process (where capitalist authority is confined to the system of reproduction); or whether, in fact, record-making is in reality an exotic variant of the capitalist mode of production in which, despite appearances, pop acts are involved in commodity production and are subject to its rigours - most notably a loss of artistic autonomy to the authority and routines of capitalist production. When the latter is argued to be the case then we engage some of the most fierce debates in Popular Music Studies; debates which trace their origin to Adorno's 'On Popular Music', published in 1941 but which took as their setting the rise of Rock Music at the turn of the 1970's. For this reason, we need to widen the discussion and to begin to draw on other sources.

Part Two:

Adorno.

Introduction.

In his review of Negus's Producing Pop Laing observes,

> I sometimes wonder what course popular music studies might have taken if Theodor Adorno had turned east to Moscow instead of west to New York when he fled from Nazi oppression in the 1930's. There would have been none of the brilliant pessimistic brooding of that 1940 essay 'On Popular Music' and most subsequent serious writers on that same subject would have not found it necessary to wrestle with Adorno's harsh categories, (Laing, 1994, p. 223)

Adorno's essay, 'On Popular Music' is more savage than 'brooding' but it is certainly pessimistic. The danger of contextualising such a work is that of reducing the historical development both of Marxism, and of Marxism's account of the rise and development of capitalism (and the whole of human history, consider the 'Communist Manifesto'), to a few short sentences. Suffice it to say that Adorno wrote from New York because he had escaped death at the hands of the Nazis (Walter Benjamin, who was far more optimistic about the Cultural Industries, had already taken his own life in flight from them); and perhaps what speaks through Adorno's work is his intense frustration with the masses, both in Europe (where they were slaughtering each other in a 'capitalist war') and in the USA (where they seemed content with their lot under a capitalism already more 'advanced' than that of Europe, despite the recent Depression). If this characterisation of the broad context of Adorno's writing is not too crude then 'frustration', even 'exasperation', seems to drive

the essay which sets off at a rapid pace that is maintained throughout. So 'rapid' is the pace that a conceptual 'sleight-of-hand' occurs early in its development which, unless caught and addressed, enables Adorno to plunge the reader, through a series of stark, historic 'oppositions', into the depths of his pessimism and contempt. These 'oppositions' are either written or implied and they range across the 'popular' and the 'serious'; 'mass culture' and 'high culture'; even 'Europe' and 'the USA'. Together they give the essay its scale and its depth.

To return, then, to the premises of Adorno's argument; first, he avoids analysing the historical gulf (that he claims exists) between 'popular' and 'serious' music. He is able to do this by arguing that as,

> ..the present study is concerned with the actual function of popular music in its present status, it is more advisable to follow the line of characterization of the phenomenon itself as it is given today than to trace it back to its origins. This is the more justified as the division into the two spheres of music took place in Europe long before American popular music arose. American music from its inception accepted the division as something pre-given, and therefore the historical background of the division applies to it only indirectly'. (Adorno, 1990, p. 302)

At once, then, Adorno is able to 'prove' what he has only asserted, namely that the differences between 'popular' and 'serious' music are 'generally taken for granted', with the effect that 'people regard the values within them as totally independent of one another'. Despite the fact that he declares his intention to not take these values for granted and to 'translate these so-called levels ('popular' and 'serious') into more precise terms, musical as well as social', by ignoring the roots of the division he is able to swiftly introduce his own, again essentially untheorised, description of popular music in this way:

> 'A clear judgement concerning the relation of serious music to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization. The whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization. Standardization extends from the most general features to the most specific ones'. (Adorno, 1990, p. 302).

The rest of the analysis contained in 'On Popular Music' flows from the concept of 'standardisation', and a compelling analysis it is. But, arguably, standardisation is not the fundamental characteristic of popular music, *recording* is; and, if this is the case, then Adorno's subsequent analysis of the 'production of popular music' (p. 306) is enlightening but not definitive. This then affects how we might approach what characterisations of the 'production processes' of pop subsequent writers have developed in response to their own readings of Adorno.

Put plainly, in the absence of an analysis of how 'popular' music separated from 'serious' music in Europe (at least in this influential essay), Adorno's analysis becomes 'ahistorical'. The 'historical background' of 'the division' between 'popular' and 'serious' music needs to be 'directly' applied to music in the USA, because we need to know why, even in the form in which Adorno discusses them, the 'industrialised' aspects of popular music-making developed in the way that they did. We need to know this because, at least in the Marxist account of history, there are no social developments in capitalism that develop through their own volition; all social developments occur through struggle, and their 'shape' (although always changing because social relations are continually dynamic) is a function of the methods of struggle and the relative strengths of the contending forces. Admittedly, this language is very abstract; we need to bring real faces, and real sounds, to the issue. Why, for example, did 'Ragtime' develop when it did; become the musical phenomenon that it

became; sell the sheet music and make the publishing fortunes that it did; and how might it have influenced the deployment of industrial practices to ensure that similar fortunes be conjured? Not just (or not at all) because 'the masses' are easily hypnotised by 'standardised' forms of music; rather, this music 'found' the masses through a continuous process of compositional 'discovery' and the commercial creation of 'markets' for music out of masses of people. In this way, composers and Music Industry entrepreneurs and their employees are active forces, in relation to each other and in relation to the need to create markets to sell, musical, commodities.

There is something far too passive about 'the masses' in Adorno's essay, and something far too conspiratorial and manipulative about capital. The tendency in 'Frankfurt School' arguments to represent the working class and capital in these ways has long been recognised in accounts of that school's strengths and weaknesses. They are attributed most usually to the forced political and geographical re-location of the Frankfurt theorists, away from the collapse of the 'revolutionary possibilities' of Europe and into the domain of a newly-prosperous and increasingly powerful American capitalism (see Middleton, 1990, p.37). The essay is almost a lament for the loss of European 'standards' in the face of the massive (in both senses of the term; as something huge; and as something 'of the masses') capitalist-cultural machinery of USA (Adorno's other targets were the film and, later, television industries). This is why it is easy to locate Adorno in the field of the 'Mass Cultural' pessimists, and also why his criticisms of pop *as music* are open to challenge. Throughout his essay, Adorno consistently elevates 'serious' European music above, implicitly, 'pernicious' US popular music, in a way that implies, rather than states, that 'musical characteristics' are autonomous and therefore comparatively easy to identify and to set against each other. In brief, there is too little 'culture' (as the product of human

interaction and conflict) and too much 'mass' in his account of popular music. If we set aside Adorno's views on what makes pop standardised as music, and consider his views on the 'mode of production' of popular music, then the core of his views is expressed in the following quotation:

> So far standardisation of popular music has been considered in structural terms - that is, as an inherent quality without explicit reference to the process of production or to the underlying causes for standardisation. Though all industrial mass production necessarily eventuates in standardisation, the production of popular music can be called industrial only in its promotion and distribution, whereas the act of producing a song-hit still remains in a handicraft stage. The production of popular music is still highly-centralised in its economic organisation, but still "individualistic" in its social mode of production. The division of labour among the composer, harmonizer, and arranger is not industrial but *rather pretends industrialisation in order to look* more up-to-date, whereas it has actually adapted industrial methods for the technique of its promotion. It would not increase the costs of production if the various composers of hit tunes did not follow certain standard patterns. Therefore we must look for other reasons for structural standardisation - very different reasons from those which account for the standardisation of motor cars and breakfast foods. (Adorno, 1990, p. 306)

Beyond any other criticism, the fundamental problem with this conception of the production of popular music as 'handicraft' rather than 'industrial' is that it pivots on song-writing rather than record-making. In large part, Adorno's essay is 'of its time'; which is not to condemn him for a failure to be clairvoyant; but there are significant differences between the 'Tin Pan Alley' practices of Adorno's day and the record manufacturing popular music industry that developed with the rise of 'Rock and Roll'. In their most fundamental form, these 'differences' can be traced to the implications of the separation of writer and the performer. While it remained the case that song-writers wrote songs for others to sing it was possible to make the case that song-writers existed 'outside' industrial production in the way that Adorno does; but even then only if we do not look too closely at the notion that 'industrialisation' in the

Music Industry can be equated only with 'promotion' and 'distribution'. As soon as we ask what is being promoted and distributed, and we arrive at the answer 'records', then we immediately enter the field of manufacture and, as comments in the first chapter sought to display, manufacture is capitalist; and pop acts need to contend with capitalist practices in the record manufacturing process. We still need to begin to identify what these practices are and, in a sense, Adorno's essay deflects from that identification.

Because Adorno's concern is with composers and with composition, he presents what was, even for the early-Forties, a distorted picture of the Music Industry. Certainly, vocalists needed songs; but crucially, band-leaders and their singers were being drawn, inexorably, into the logic of record production, a logic that pivots on the single recognition that a market for records must continually be fed. Clearly, all of this will need more systematic attention but there is a major difference between singers who constantly perform live and singers who make records for sale; put simply, a touring act (whether solo vaudeville performer or 'Swing' orchestra) could repeat the same set on a nightly basis for a considerable period without the need for new 'material'; simply because they could 'tour' that set, nightly, from city to city; from venue to venue within a city; or, as club residents, perform to a changing nightly audience. Under these conditions, the 'conditions' that faced Adorno on his arrival in the USA, his picture of the song-writer as individual who wrote in his or her own time; organised their own production conditions; paid their own overheads; and bore all the risk of their commitment to this kind of work, could be said to still exist (although already much else had happened, and was happening, in popular music-making that was not encompassed by this experience). 'Song-writers', in this version of events, wrote in isolation from record companies. Their interface with the

industry existed through a dependence on the 'song pluggers' that publishers employed to take songs to band-leaders. Band-leaders would then arrange these songs; their contracted singers would sing them; and record companies would organise and pay for the recording session, disc manufacture and promotion and distribution costs, in the way that Adorno indicates (but does not analyse).

Adorno presents a static picture of popular music production that captured a particular period in its development - a period which saw the beginnings of a post-depression recovery in the record market and the predominance of radio record shows, together with, in this instance, the musical film, as forms of mass entertainment. Although live music continued to hold sway; what came to sustain interest in touring acts was no longer simply their 'live' reputation but the continuous re-establishment of that reputation through 'hit' records; particularly with the growth in prominence of vocalists (especially Frank Sinatra). Once records became important in their own right, the need to systematise their commodification became imperative; so changing relationships between composers, acts and record companies.

I am aware that the above overly condenses profound upheavals in popular music in the period in question, but, arguably the 'distortions' so caused are Adorno's responsibility, in the sense that he makes no account of the changing dynamic of popular music production in his portrayal of how popular music is made. For Adorno, popular music was standardised and the 'machine' was continually fed by 'imitators' who supplied a be-numbed mass with pre-digested pap. There is none of the richness here of the rise of Blues, Bop, and, later, R&B; nor even any acknowledgement that, when lyrical concerns were restricted either to love or novelty, some composers (Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael) could still tower over

others. This reinforces my earlier reluctance to consider the work of Adorno a fountain-head for PMS, so dismissive was he of pop, in general. But my objection is stronger than this: Adorno made his argument to serve a political purpose - the identification of the condition of class relations in the wake of Fascism and rising US hegemony - and this caused him to work at a very general level where the actual practices of the music industry are concerned (his analysis of how pop works as music is more insightful and specific but not less contentious - see Middleton, 1990). Ultimately, he identified pop as a capitalist commodity because it was musically standardised, and therefore passive and uncritical, unlike 'serious', artistic, music. This meant that he did not need to specify pop as an industrial commodity in terms of its production processes; in fact, he made its 'extra-industrial' origins an aspect of pop's power - as the source of the legitimating 'pseudo-individualization' of pop; a patina of individual human creativity (and therefore of spurious 'emotional truth') that served to mask its similarity to standardised cars and standardised breakfast cereals. Yet, by neither specifying how, even then, the record industry made choices about which songs to record; and, further, by not specifying acts and their records, rather than songs, as the true commodities of the Music Industry, the following criticisms can be made of Adorno:

1. So general is his analysis, and so neatly does he side-step the need to consider the manufacture and sale of records, that it is doubtful that his analysis of popular music was accurate even at the time he wrote.

2. So time-bound and abstract is his portrayal of music industry practices that his work is of very limited use in determining how the contemporary music industry functions.

Adorno's identification of 'standardisation' was too much 'of its time'. It reflects the mass production capitalism summed-up in Henry Ford's maxim 'you can have any colour you want so long as it's black'. Adorno would not have been impressed by the continuous upheavals in pop styles in the decades since he wrote; the transit of pop to Rock; the involutions of Rock as 'political'; Rock as an Art form; Rock as political vehicle for making art; the transit from Rock to Dance as post-political hedonism; all of this he would, no doubt, dismiss as a superficial effect of 'the constantly renewed effort to sweep the market with new products' (Adorno, 1990, p. 311). But, by missing the detail, Adorno misses the *struggles* these 'transits' represent; he misses, not only the reasons why people elect for consuming (and making) pop rather than, say, fireside rugs, as a mass pastime, but also the reasons why people support some pop styles against others. The strength of Frith's work, which develops from an engagement with Adorno, is that he can situate the uses made of pop in ways that tell us much about why pop is consumed *and* why it goes on being made, and goes on changing (see below). In this study, I am less concerned with 'why' pop is made than with 'how' pop is made; because, it seems from the evidence of 'failure' - as either the failure to win a record deal or the failure to make successful records - that pop 'goes on being made' at the expense of most pop acts. The day after an act is 'dropped" the audience is still in one piece; the record company is in one piece; and the music industry is intact; the act, though, is usually shattered.

Conclusion.

Because of the unsystematic way in which the study of the music industry was mounted, we are forced to begin a study of how that industry is conceptualised by comparing and contrasting texts separated not just by entire theoretical traditions

(Marxism and Functionalism) but by three decades. To an attempt an amalgam of those texts would, then, be bad practice indeed. Even so, the absence of the lived experience of pop acts from these accounts is notable in both cases. Further, both represent music industry organisations (specifically record companies) as ruthlessly efficient - music is recognised as a cultural commodity but neither its consumption nor, paradoxically, its *production* is particularly clearly explained: Adorno certainly discusses pop as *music* but his hostility to it leads him to ignore the experience of music-makers as record-makers simply because he feels their efforts to be without merit; Hirsch, as we have seen, pays no attention whatever (except in the most abstract sense) to music-makers. For Hirsch, pop consumption is no more than the (temporary) satisfaction for the latest 'fad'. On this basis, he can assert 'overproduction' without considering why some records, and therefore acts, are taken up, even as 'fads', while the vast majority are not - this is not entirely accurate, Hirsch makes clear the need for business efficiency in a competitive world; but, again, the impact of business practices on music-makers and their fates is never broached.

In sum, Adorno's hostility, and Hirsch's indifference, to popular music made them unlikely guides to the complexities of making music with the aim of attaining mass sales. Despite this, we are at least cautioned by these theorists to be mindful of the centrality of commodification measures and practices in the realisation of pop success - where the distaff is that these methods and practices must also be implicated in the pervasiveness of large-scale failure.

Chapter Three:

Simon Frith and The Sociology of Rock.

Introducing Frith.

Whether in Sociology or in Musicology, where the 'positive' study of pop is concerned (as against mass culturalist condemnation or Functionalist indifference to pop's aesthetic and cultural purchase), 'pioneers' have needed to lead the way. In the British experience, the most significant pioneers have been Dave Laing and Simon Frith, but while Laing's impressive The Sound of Our Time (1969) is largely overlooked, the more comprehensive early work of Simon Frith, The Sociology of Rock, has come to stand as the first major sympathetic academic analysis of pop. As a pioneering work, The Sociology of Rock (henceforward S/R) retains it's significance, but, understandably, this work bears, in part, the hallmarks of it's time of writing, the mid-1970's, when the position of 'Rock', as the dominant style of pop seemed unassailable; and when also Rock appeared to have transformed the methods by which pop was made (apparently favouring the 'artist' rather than 'the organisation' in the commodity making process). Even so, while Frith's purpose was to study the phenomenon of Rock (rather than account for pop) he still needed to establish how the music industry worked; in part to establish pop's socio-historic setting; in part to help anatomise the specific ideological claims made by and for Rock. Further, because of his commitment to the 'value' (p. 195) of the production and consumption

of Rock, Frith, as had Laing previously, felt the need to assert that value against Adorno's denunciation of pop. Finally, as someone writing, specifically, a 'sociology' of a musical phenomenon, Frith needed to situate the 'place' of Rock within social relations. He achieved this by taking as his starting point the views of theorists of 'Youth Culture' whose work, collectively, formed the only substantial, sociological source of research extant on the wider social use made of popular music and therefore on pop's consumers and likely future producers. Taken together this distinct combination of objects of address and the chosen method for that address, when further combined with Frith's prodigious subsequent contribution to the nascent 'Popular Music Studies', established a *de facto* agenda for the study of pop which, while this has never been prescriptive, is still one that demands address in any estimation of music industry practices and music-making perspectives.

Before beginning a close examination of Frith's S/R (from the perspective of this study - the search for the roots of the majority failure of signed pop acts), I need to clarify that I do not consider that this single work stands for the total of Frith's writing on pop. Again, this has been prodigious, but it has also been protean. In advance of any closer analysis, what Frith brought to writing about the sociology of pop music, in general, was a sense of academic rigour to a field in which written reflection (mainly in the form of journalism) had expanded exponentially in the years that immediately followed the identification of 'Rock' as a distinct stylistic, even generic, outgrowth of pop. Rock ideology came with considerable ideological baggage or, at least, was attributed enormous ideological importance by its supporters. Throughout not just the S/R but all his work, Frith defends Rock (and latterly pop) from its friends as well as from its detractors - where Rock ideologues romanticised musicians and even individual record labels, Frith asked, and continues

to ask, hard questions about the motivations, cultural place and artistic autonomy of those acts and labels. In all his subsequent work, Frith has been consistent in his determination to explore the (changing) power of pop to focus and articulate the cultural concerns of its consumers. This has led him to contribute to the academic study of pop on the widest range of topics - from sexuality to aesthetics.

In all of the above, however, it is arguable whether Frith has ever substantially revised the depiction, contained within the pages of the S/R, of how pop acts come to record companies and of what happens to them there. 'Sound Effects' re-organises the structure of his argument, but contributes nothing that is substantially different on this complex field. Other works discuss pop acts from the point of view of their cultural roots (Frith and Horne, 1987); their connections with local government (Frith 1993); and their style (1990 a.). Where the music and record industries are concerned, Frith has been keen to explore the impact of video and the strictures and implications of copyright ownership - but his organising concern has always been to analyse why people derive pleasurable meaning from music and, in this way, why record-making remains a viable *cultural* industry. In contrast to this study, Frith is interested in pop because its consumption is the guarantee of pop's continued existence (in whatever stylistic form). This does not mean that Frith is ignorant of how pop is produced (far from it, he constantly exhorts 'post modernists' to consider the imperatives that inform production decisions and processes), but there remains a sense in which how pop acts experience the production process is of less concern to him than how *consumers* both inspire, and suffer, that production process. This exploration of this tension or contradiction forms the field of the S/R.

The Sociology of Rock.

As the book jacket introduction to the work observes,

> Over the last 20 years Rock has become the most pervasive form of popular culture and the most prosperous part of the entertainment industry. But, despite the millions of words that Rock has inspired, our understanding of it as a mass medium remains sketchy. The Rock world's account of itself still rests on a confusing concoction of myth, fantasy and commercial hype, and outside commentators remain depressingly prone to ignorant sneers and instant generalisations. The purpose of 'The Sociology of Rock' is to take Rock seriously as a social phenomenon and to get its story right. (Frith, 1978)

For the purposes of this argument, the question is not so much does Frith get Rock's story right? But rather, in the discovery of Rock's story, what does Frith tell us about how Rock, and, with it, pop, is made under industrial conditions; and, further, what might we learn of the protocols of the majority failure of signed pop acts from this account?

The Sociology of Rock (S/R) is a seminal text; for the reasons stated above; but its central importance to this study is apparent from an observation Frith makes early in the analysis:

> Records are the result of complex formal organisations .. the basis of any sociological analysis of records must be an analysis of the record industry .. Pop music is created with the record industry's pursuit of a large audience in mind .. The record industry has developed its rules of production from its interpretation of the youth market .. The ideology of Rock is riddled with untested assumptions about youth culture. The Sociologists first task must be to strip away the resulting accumulation of myths and false certainties. (Frith, 1978, p.10)

If we set aside, for the moment, Frith's observations on the connection between 'the rules of production' of the record industry and its 'untested assumptions about youth culture' and concentrate instead on his declaration that, 'pop music is created with the record industry's pursuit of a large audience in mind', then, firstly, we need to realise that this is no statement of the obvious. Rather, at least as far as Hirsch's argument is concerned, it is stating the reverse of his (and the colloquial) understanding of what the record industry does, namely, to replicate recordings of songs made, in the first instance, as 'art-objects' by people who want, first and foremost, to 'express themselves' as musical artists. In this account, only latterly do record companies become involved; the record industry does not 'create' but replicate. To suggest the reverse, that record companies do the creating in order to make profits is, seemingly, to concur with Adorno that any products so created are worthless because they are not 'art'.

Ultimately, Frith transcends both the above positions, he views pop neither solely as replicated art nor as entirely manufactured commercial fodder. However, when Frith began to write these were the polar opposites in the Rock version of its own distance from pop, Almost immediately, then, any examination of Rock music draws us into an ideological tangle that consists of competing notions of popular music as entertainment, and popular music as creative expression. This is the 'tangle' that Frith attempts to sort out in the S/R and, in a sense, he has gone on trying to sort it out ever since. What so distinguishes even this very earliest academic work is that Frith could identify how entertainment could be *anti*-capitalist and how 'self-expression' needed always to co-exist with the market-place - where both notions, if not entirely antithetical to Rock orthodoxy, still represented a profound challenge to that orthodoxy.

Frith's main strength in the S/R is that he was willing to deal with the fact that, where any form of popular music is concerned, including Rock, the material reality was (and still is) that Rock acts had to sign to major record companies and sell huge quantities of records in order to survive. On this basis, Frith's argument is a continuous, well-argued, 'balancing act' that seeks primarily to reconstitute the making (and particularly the consumption) of pop music as an activity that expresses real needs rather than sedates those needs (as Adorno claimed); while remaining close to Hirsch's overview of the signing, recording, release process as one of 'filtering'. This is a 'tall order'. Frith's analysis is evidently Marxist, although it is burdened neither by dogma nor neologisms; even so, in his desire to somehow 'neutralise' the negative, Adornian implications of records as commodities, he doesn't quite pull off his 'balancing act'.

Frith fails, primarily (and ironically) because he understands so well that the connections between production and consumption are the key to understanding why popular music takes the ultimate forms it does. In brief, as is apparent from the previously quoted extract from the S/R, Frith's analysis is driven by the recognition that records are the *combined* result of the activities of 'complex formal organisations' and the concentration of the activities of those organisations in the 'pursuit of a large audience'. I will argue that, in developing this recognition, Frith downplays, and so misrepresents, the industrial production of pop records (the source of the Mass Culturalist critique) to foreground the 'Popular Cultural' (active rather than passive) consequences of their consumption. Because he has a wider aim than exploring the sociology of rock - he wants to rescue rock from Adorno - Frith tends to collapse the experience of pop acts into the industrial process of making records. Arguably, records are the result of more than complex formal organisations, they are the result

of 'alliances' between pop acts and record companies. In this way, and the existence of the record contract is at once elegant, and mute, testimony to it, records are the result of the joint activities of *two* organisations (pop acts and record companies) that, together, form an even more complex organisation than the one that Frith has in mind.

With the last point, above, in view, it is still the case that what distinguishes Frith from Hirsch *and* Adorno is the way he handles the recognition that 'records are the result of complex formal organisations'. In Adorno's account, pop acts are simply not present; there are only artisan song-writers who supply faceless singers who, in turn, act as the mouth-pieces for drivel. Hirsch is not judgmental in his analysis (as befits a 'Functionalist') but neither does he 'grasp the nettle' of his own recognition of the need for formal organisations to produce cultural products. Frith does this; he isn't afraid to confront the fact that pop acts are not autonomous artists who furnish 'art-objects' for 'replication'. Instead, he immediately sets about identifying the major actors in the drama of record production; yet, along the way, he raises far more questions about the activities he describes than he ever answers. In this way, Frith's account of the music industry is a strength, but also a major weakness of the case contained in the S/R.

When analysing the argument contained in the S/R we need to be aware, from the outset, that Frith's central concern is 'slippery' - it is records and how they are made, certainly - but, overwhelmingly, it is 'Rock' music that concerns him. More than this, it is the examination of the creation and social place of 'Rock' as an ideology that will occupy the bulk of the text. This, as we will see, has important repercussions for his treatment of the industrial production of popular musical products.

As we have noted, the S/R is, ultimately, what it declares itself to be, a study of a style rather than a study of popular music as a whole. However, given the absence of a single, systematic account of the history and nature of popular music to which he could refer, Frith was forced to situate his stylistic study within his own analysis of what pop music is; how it had evolved to that point; and what its contemporary practice consisted of. As Frith notes in his preface,

> my aim has been to provide an analysis that has general validity, that is not confined to particular Rock styles or to particular Rock moments. (Frith, 1978, p.8)

Because of his need to establish a general context to explore a particular social and musical phenomenon (the rise and cultural significance of Rock Music), the S/R veers between general observations about pop music whose implications go unpursued in order to gain the goal of explaining what gave Rock music, as a style, the powerful ideological attraction it exerted in the late 1960's. Even though Rock was a considerable force, it was never the whole of pop music, as Frith regularly points out. In this way, because of its need to create a general framework for a particular end, where the S/R often has its greatest bearing on a discussion about the possible consequences of industrial practices for the fate of pop acts is in terms of what is left under-developed in the course of the analysis it contains, rather than in what the analysis reveals, detailed and comprehensive though this is.

Frith and Youth Culture.

In the light of his own objectives, then, ('the stripping away of the myths and false certainties inherent in the record industry's interpretation of the youth market')

Frith proceeds in the following way. In part one of the work he examines theories of 'youth culture'. He then tests their different conclusions against his own primary research into the use and the consumption of popular music by 14 year olds in Northern England. Briefly summarised, he argues that the existing sociological accounts of the importance of music in youth cultures are variously inadequate. 'Adolescence Theories' are inadequate because 'leisure is not related to work in any material setting':

> the analysis is classless: all adolescents have the same needs and create the same peer group systems, music therefore fulfills the same purpose for all of them. (Frith, 1978, p.49)

On the other hand, in 'sub cultural' explanations (where these do attempt to differentiate between groups of young people), music appears only as a 'symbol' which 'expresses underlying leisure values' and, further, as a symbol that is 'completely subsumed in the much more general notion of style'. In both instances,

> ..sub-culturalists fail to make sense of (music) as an activity, one enjoyed by the vast majority of non-deviant kids. (Frith, 1978, p.53)

This leads him to the conclusion that,

> Observing sociologists are wrong to elevate the most visibly different leisure styles above the less apparent sexual and occupational differences in leisure activities. (Frith, 1978, p.53)

For Frith, what it is crucial to recognise about the youth market (the total of young consumers of music - the people whose mass use of some music as leisure makes that music popular) is that it contains,

> Different youth groups who use Rock in different ways: class, sex and occupational differences have a determinate effect on the leisure choices that young people can make. (Frith, 1978, p.70)

In a very real sense, this observation is the lynch-pin of the entire argument contained in the S/R. Frith, I would argue, has *two* objectives in the work: the first is the overt aim of laying bare the operation of Rock as an ideological construct. Central to this task is the creation of a model that connects the reasons that inform musical choice and the choice of a particular musical form as a leisure activity, with the role that leisure plays, in general, in contemporary society. Frith accomplishes this connection through the working out of an innovative, clearly-expressed and recognisably Marxist argument which, as a Marxist argument must do, takes relations of production and contradictions between these and the productive forces of society as its defining points of reference. Inside this, he proceeds as above, dismissing the various youth cultural theories of the importance of music for young people to conclude that leisure possibilities - and with them the meaning that leisure choices have for young people - are experienced differently by different groups in terms of their different relationships to the productive process. He then adds in the further defining differences of the sex, age and race of young consumers to provide a more detailed picture; firstly, of why blanket generalisations about 'pernicious pop' are inaccurate (cf. Adorno) and, secondly, of why and how it is that Rock music can make (young) people feel differently about themselves and the world; how, ideologically, it can challenge the social places assigned to young people and the roles and beliefs and behaviour patterns that go with those 'places'.

This 'challenge' is then examined in the contexts of the historical and the stylistic roots of Rock's ideological composition. However, what emerges in the course of the unfolding of this, unspecified but, still recognisable, historical materialist account of Rock as a musical-cultural complex is that Frith has a second object or target - to show how and in what ways Rock is a site of *popular cultural struggle* - and not some relatively unvariegated commodity fashioned for young people by record companies. It is here that his differences with Adorno and Hirsch are at their sharpest. Rock is not (just) a fad or fashion; and neither is it an industrially constructed palliative to pacify the masses. In however incoherent, incomplete and compromised a way, Rock, as a musical form, is an attempt to express needs and feelings that contradict the subordinate position of the majority (in different ways, according to social location and the use made of Rock products) enforced under the complex social power relations of capitalism. The audience doesn't always get what it wants, or enjoy what it hears, but consuming pop music is still a source of uncontrolled and uncontrollable pleasure and this is what gives it its cultural power.

To consider this last point in greater detail, in congruence with the general elements of Marxist theory (that conflict is the motor of events and that conflicts are articulated in and through ideologies; which, in turn, are constructed out of social beliefs practised as cultures that are inscribed by continuous conflict) Frith argues Rock's importance as a consequence of its potential to disrupt the essentially precarious relationship between leisure and work. This relationship is 'precarious' in the sense that neither are fixed quantities but owe their contemporary form and expression to the current status of the conflict between employers and workers; between 'Capital' and 'Labour'. Rock has the potential to disrupt work-leisure

relations because, as it is composed of leisure products informed by a distinct ideology, it can, at its best, hold out the promise of a 'better life to come'. This ideological imperative possesses the force to fuel inherent, structural dissatisfaction with work-leisure relations on the part of (particularly young) workers (and would-be workers) who have most to lose in the current configuration of capital's power over labour. Clearly, capitalism does not want dissatisfaction with the profit system to gain the momentum that might lead to challenge and confrontation across society. There are two sides to a struggle and Frith seizes on Hirsch's deployment of the key concepts of the 'filtering process' and media 'gate-keeping' to demonstrate how these processes are, themselves, expressive of contradiction and conflict. On the one hand, the institutions that benefit from young people's love of Rock music need to maintain that commitment; on the other, they need to constrain its disruptive potential, with the result that an on-going struggle obtains (albeit in confused ways and with considerable ebbing and flowing) between creators of Rock and purveyors of Rock, with the conditions of the consumption of Rock as its arena. Whilst persuasive, this view collapses pop acts and record companies into a general category of 'creators' of Rock, in so doing completely missing the tensions that might exist between acts and companies - 'tensions' that express themselves, eventually, as the failure of seven out of eight signed acts.

To expand on this last point, above, Frith's argument does have considerable intellectual force; but an important shift occurs within it which, if we identify it here, will make us better placed to discuss its implications, more closely, below. At base, in re-locating some of Hirsch's main points, some of Hirsch's 'bloodlessness' is detectable in Frith's own argument in the way that he introduces us to real actors in the cycle of production and consumption, but then fails to animate them. At different

points in the S/R, Frith is determined to make his argument concrete rather than abstract (his primary research on the musical tastes of fourteen-year olds is evidence of this). When he eventually arrives at the discussion of who does what in the Music Industry, Frith, again, considers the roles of individual music industry figures (A&R people, Managers, and so on), but in his commitment to the need to demonstrate the *value* of pop and the value of the study of pop (against the various Mass Culturalist opponents of these related recognitions), his arguments tend to take place at the level of social institutions which represent the 'high ground' commanded by Leavis and Adorno, alike. Consequently, we lose sight completely of what it must be like to want to make popular music; of the actual business of writing songs, rehearsing material, playing live, making demos, and contacting music industry figures, including record company representatives. The institutions may well be caught in the contradictions of a life-or-death class struggle, we cannot say; all we can say is that those institutions decimate aspirant pop acts. In his attempt at 'stripping away' the record industry's 'myths and false certainties' Frith opens considerable, theoretical distance from Hirsch's functionalism and from the romanticism of Rock journalists; but, arguably, in doing this he moves too far from the actual experience of making the music he is determined to 'value'.

Frith on Record-making.

That Frith covers considerable theoretical 'ground' in the course of his analysis is, in many ways, as it should be; the S/R is, after all, a ground-breaking study and it is very much a product of its time. The S/R is a product of a time when Marxism was still being 'discovered' academically (largely out of the 'oppositionist' upheavals of the 1960's - of which Rock itself was a part - that characterised the

breakdown of the certainties and consensus of the post-war, and Cold War, years). Marxist theory 'led the way' in, what proved to be, the emergence of Cultural Studies in Britain. As a consequence, the S/R displays the great strengths but also some of the weaknesses of this new, broad, interest in conflicts within and around popular cultural products. What Frith's analysis gains from Marxism, and from the 'new' (less economically deterministic) Marxism in particular, is, primarily, the explanatory power, the conceptual 'sweep', offered, in general, by Marxist theory. Secondly, the work gains in and through the determination it displays to identify, not just the sources of conflict which frame the pop and Rock experience, but the expression of that conflict in ideological terms. This last 'gain' is made by Culturalist Marxism (in the very broadest sense) in the way that it identifies ideology not simply as some by-product of economic conflict (as more determinist Marxists portrayed it, when they referred to it at all) but as a site of conflict itself. Frith clearly subscribes to this view but, in his embrace of it, he also takes on board its weaknesses which, in his case, (and strictly within the terms of his own argument) is a tendency to reverse the fault of the economic determinists. This reversal, put crudely, is to neglect the specification of the composition of the material context for conflict in order to emphasise the importance of the forms of expression of conflict as forces in their own right. In short, Frith is so concerned to show how conflict takes place in and through the production and consumption of popular music in ideological terms (as Rock's creators and consumers demand and celebrate 'licence' and the industry and its allies strive to contain this expression while, simultaneously, keeping the economic power of Rock alive) that he under-develops his own portrayal of the material framework of record production - the very aspect of his work that marked its distance from that of the majority of Rock commentators. In breaking with determinism, Frith

breaks too energetically, and, consequently, he displays a clear tendency to lead us towards the music-maker's experience of making music, and towards the generalised experience of 'failure', but to stop short of pursuing his exploration of the conditions and consequences of the relationships he depicts.

So, to resume, the youth market is the product of a class-divided society and it is also internally divided. If there is no unified market for popular music products, and for Rock products as a variety of these, then there can be no single use made of Rock (as Adolescence and Sub-Cultural theorists of youth imply that there is). Further, if there is no single use made of pop then there cannot be a single, unified understanding of what pop, itself, is. The understanding of pop - and particularly of Rock, Frith would here argue - is then a matter for contention, contention, at the very least, between record companies' definitions of Rock and fan's definitions of Rock, and 'contended understandings' are, precisely, what ideologies are. In this way, the forces that contend over the question of what Rock really is are not simply different groups of consumers who interpret Rock differently while record companies somehow neutrally supply them with 'ammunition'; instead, there is an over-arching contention for definition, the one referred to above - the conflict between what the record industry wants from Rock and what Rock (as a complex of creators and consumers) wants from itself. As Frith argues,

> There is another source of constraint on youth music... the leisure industry has a determinate effect on the leisure choices that are available. Young people's leisure is not just limited by their relation to production as workers, it is also limited by their relation to production as consumers. To understand Rock, it is not enough to describe what young people do with musical products when they get them, we also have to describe how these musical products got there in the first place. (Frith, 1978, p.71)

It is in his treatment of the last process above, one central to this enquiry, that the tensions and, arguably, the weaknesses of the S/R are most evident.

Frith's argument for the necessity of describing how 'musical products' get to young people is entirely congruent with his recognition (with Hirsch) that 'records are the result of complex formal organisations'. Even so, for all the information and analytical insights it contains, Frith's account does little more than skim the surface of record production. This follows from his use of a broad description of how the record industry operates as a stepping stone to his central concern with the ideology of Rock and to what social forces contend in and through this ideology. In this way, his treatment of the record industry as a means to this distinct end encourages the shortfall in the exploration of music-making, referred to previously.

So detailed and multi-faceted is Frith's account of the record industry that it will prove more productive to begin with his conclusions about its methods of operation and to work backwards through the factors which lead him in their particular direction. His conclusions are expressed in the following ways:

> Records are the result of contributions from a variety of forms of labour. If the basic inputs are musicians skills, record companies' capital, pieces of music, the value of the finished product depends upon inputs from many other workers - producers and engineers, labourers in the pressing plants, sleeve designers and printers. Each contribution to record-making rests on its own organisation of capital. (Frith, 1978, p.87)

And,

> Records have a "special nature" .. as cultural commodities - demand for them is not easily controllable. So far I have only covered one element in the "filtering process" - the A&R department, through which the mass of potential recording musicians passes to emerge as a trickle. Once through this net, a musician can be almost certain that a record will emerge - that was the purpose of his contract - but for the record company the point of record issue is the point where the problems of over-production begin. The "filtering process" becomes most

> apparent in the strategies which companies are compelled to adopt to realise the exchange value of their products in the market. (Frith, 1978, p.87)

As we are aware, 'uncontrollable demand'; 'overproduction', 'the "filtering process" ', are all taken directly from Hirsch; yet, while Frith couches his remarks in exactly the terms of Hirsch's argument, ultimately, he places those concepts in a significantly different setting. The key to the entire, combined sequence lies in the combination of two of its observations: that records are made as the result of a 'filtering process' and that this filtering process is evident in the strategies which companies are 'compelled to adopt' where, critically, it is the compulsion to make profits, and the inescapability of this logic, which informs *all* of the decision-making inside the record industry. Even at this stage, we are cautioned, implicitly, not to treat popular music texts as solely *aesthetic* creations - texts 'emerge' from the interaction of 'pieces of music' with the complexity of record manufacture and marketing - but Frith leaves the tensions embedded within this caution, together with its implications, almost unexplored. He fails, therefore, to determine and specify how, and in what ways, economically-driven production decisions (in the sense of industrial production rather than the more familiar sense of record production) might impact on original, creative raw material; and, with it, on the condition and fate of the acts whose appearance, 'story' and music is undergoing transformation.

Frith's concluding chapter begins with the observation that has helped contextualise this study:

> The power of music comes .. from its popularity. Music becomes a mass culture by entering a mass consciousness .. mass music is recorded music, records which don't sell don't become popular, don't enter mass consciousness whatever their particular artistic claims (and) their authenticity. (Frith, 1978, p.203)

We should now be in a position to *challenge* this view. If record companies are 'compelled' to adopt 'strategies' to market records that emerge from a stringent, profit-led, 'filtering process' and that these records 'construct' the popular ('records that don't sell don't enter mass consciousness') then, clearly, there is much we need to ask about this 'filtering process', these 'strategies, and the business of selling records so that they 'enter mass consciousness'. In the case of the 'filtering process for example, we need to ask the questions that neither Hirsch nor Frith does: how does it work? Who does the filtering? On what terms and by what methods does 'filtering' take place? And with what effects on, and results for, the pop acts who believe they have been signed to become successes? Essentially, there is an atmosphere of neutrality, of the clinical, about Frith's use of these terms; it is the 'sterility' identified in Hirsch's presentation of the 'filtering process' that has gone untransformed in Frith's account. Again, there is no human experience here; there is nothing of the 'fifty six thousand rock acts extant at any moment', from chapter one of this study. Yet, if these Rock acts each write only five new songs in a year, that makes Britain annually host to over a quarter of a million new songs. We have already seen that (only) five thousand singles are released every year and that only about one and a half thousand of these enter the charts (mostly for a handful of weeks in the chart's lower reaches). Taken together, these figures represent a 'filtering' of epic proportions and it is a messy, profligate filtering. It is messy and wasteful because there is no clinicism involved; instead, the 'filtering' begins with young people who not only have no experience of 'the world' (certainly of the world of global business networks) they have little time for the world *per se* - not because they are uninterested in it, but because they are interested in only one aspect of it, music-making. How their musical efforts then

reach record companies and are there transformed into pop commodities depends, at every stage of the 'filtering process', on the efforts of individuals they must trust but whose efforts they cannot monitor. 'Strategies', the 'filtering process' are human actions performed in the name of making music to make money for record companies. We need, therefore, to recognise at the outset that 'strategies' can fail as well as succeed and that a 'filtering process' can be inefficient as well as efficient. As such we need to further appreciate how this recognition problematises the as yet unexplored connections (if such connections exist, and Frith seems certain that they do) between record company practices and the musical activities of pop acts; where the record, the cultural commodity, the popular musical text, is the *result* of these interactions. If the unsigned pop act is a 'proto-pop act' then its material must be 'proto-pop music'; each composition is only a *proto-text*, a 'piece of music' that has not yet passed through the 'filtering process' to 'emerge' as a record; and the record emerges as a result of decisions taken by non-musicians about the work of musicians, almost always definitively where its success or failure is concerned

Frith on 'Intermediaries'.

Frith begins the consideration of 'Making Records' with a study of recording contracts. This is a telling place to start; for most acts, 'signing a deal' can be seen as the culmination of an often lengthy and emotionally demanding process; when, in fact, it is only 'the end of the beginning'. The contract's existence as a legal document and the implications of this for the relationships embodied within it (particularly as the codification of the record company's conditions of ownership of the pop act's recorded work) is presented impressively in the S/R as a living framework for record production rather than as some dry document far removed from the exciting world of

making and releasing pop records. On this basis, Frith is able to reflect not simply on what the conditions of ownership mean for acts - immediately and essentially that companies and not acts have 'the final power to decide whether a song or sound is of sufficient quality' - but he is able to bring into play the structures and relationships which contracts invoke and demand in order that the terms of such ownership are organised and enforced and their fruits delivered. Principal among these 'structures and relationships' is the need for *intermediaries* to represent both the act and the record company in negotiation and in the conduct of their business, in general. We will need to return continuously to the dependency of pop acts on intermediary figures throughout this study - these are the actors whose actions combine to make music for money - yet, once he has identified who the most important of these are (managers and the A&R department of the record company, respectively) and has commented, briefly, on what their main roles and functions consist of, Frith then moves quickly onto the further aspects of record production in its broadest sense and to the delivery of recorded musical products to, and in, the market-place. Arguably, though, it is too soon to move on; the transformation of acts and their compositions is underway. As earlier remarks have indicated (during the discussion on Hirsch's work) acts compose music outside the record company; once under the latter's control, the pressures and demands inherent in the act's relationship with the record company can go on impacting on the transformation of the composition into the recorded and released text (and on themselves as an intrinsic part of the total of the commodity on offer); Frith declares as much. He has declared as much but he does not explore his declaration; we can explore this declaration if only through its omissions.

The immediate implication of the recognition that much of the recording relationship depends on the activities (and therefore on the perspectives, beliefs and

methods) of intermediaries is, clearly, that an act never deals directly with a record company - with the result that how that act understands its relationship with the record company; what its expectations of the record company are; and how it acts on the basis of those understandings and expectations, will always be informed by impressionism and imprecision. As Cohen has shown, when pop acts form they are usually made up of young people with little experience of business and with an understanding of the record industry formed out of exactly the 'myths and false certainties' that Frith is endeavouring to 'strip away'. Arguably, (and ahead of primary research) most of the intermediary figures they come into contact with on an immediate, local level (nascent managers, local promoters, roadies, sound engineers, DJ's, local music journalists and the like) will also have no direct experience of the global record industry, but these local representatives of the music industry are likely to have also bought into those myths and will help reinforce rather than dispel them. It is especially for this reason that I have tried to maintain a distinction between the 'music industry' and the 'record industry', thus far.

From their inception, then, pop acts become reliant on others over whom they have no direct control and about whose activities they have little or no direct knowledge. As (usually) a group of people struggling towards a goal, the act itself will have its own internal dynamic. Further, once allied with a manager or management company, a new dynamic and new struggles over material and identity will ensue, and these 'struggles' will be inflected by and through the additional relationships the act and its manager will be forced to negotiate as the act begins to record, to perform, and to court record companies. In this way, acts develop dependencies, long before record contracts are signed and they extend far beyond the doors of the offices of the record companies that draw up those highly-prized

documents. In the S/R, Frith hints at the 'cast list' in this 'drama' but neither introduces us to its members nor invites us to the performance; instead, he uses them as a spring-board to his principle concern - Rock as a site of popular cultural struggle. In this way, we are led to the fringes of what it must mean to make music that, of necessity, must become an industrial product, a commodity, but we are then diverted from any closer encounter with this 'collaborative' and transformative process and left with little insight (beyond Hirschian 'over-production') into why it results in the failure of so many signed pop acts.

In the above way, Frith demonstrates that pop acts are drawn into the commodification process by their own desire to become successful, to make 'hit' records and displays how their attempts to enter this process involve them signing contracts with major record companies. He shows us that these activities are almost always mediated by individuals and agencies that form an interface between the acts as 'raw talent' or 'raw material' and the record industry that transforms this into pop commodities. Further, as we have noted above, he demonstrates (by implication) that these individuals simultaneously represent the act to the industry and the industry to the act and, also, they also represent their own interest as efficient providers of such inter-facial activities. Hirsch describes *all* these 'intermediaries' as 'talent scouts' and somehow trusts that they would be always efficient by the (implied) operation of 'market forces' (only the efficient survive and prosper). The record industry is a capitalist, profit-seeking industry. It dominates commodity production through its ownership of capital. However, as Frith is at pains to show, it does not directly dominate popular taste (which is as much a *refusal* of the strictures of domination as it is an acceptance, through consumption). Further, the industry does not dominate the imaginations of composers (as Adorno argued). Even so, when everyone wants

success it is reasonable to argue that the beliefs, practices and rules of production (the 'culture') of those best placed to realise success must hold sway. Frith takes us to the threshold of this culture - then leaves us there.

Frith on Record Companies.

Frith's depiction of the social relations of record production is undynamic; the ways that record industry professionals set goals and targets is not considered. Instead, there are relatively fixed 'record companies' that deal with an undifferentiated 'mass of potential recording musicians'. What this fails to consider is the range and quality of potential interactions between record companies, the representatives of pop acts and the pop acts themselves. Because acts are compelled to rely on intermediaries to negotiate for them, the act is always relatively disempowered in its relations with a record company - put simply, there is no way that an act can know the content of all the decisions taken in their name and on their behalf, either by their manager with record company representatives, or between those representatives themselves. Yet the act needs to know the content and the implications of decisions because it is they who will suffer if 'careers' are not successfully created. No decisions are trivial, as Frith writes,

> companies don't just sign a group and leave them to get on with it .. talent (has to be translated) into a saleable product. (Frith, 1978, pp.78-79)

In this way, all decisions are decisions of 'translation', or, for these purposes, 'transformation'. Under these conditions, and particularly within the strictures of the

extreme time-boundedness of all recording and marketing activity (restrictions that Hirsch concedes but never theorises), it is fair to suggest that what emerges as the product is never fully within the control of the act. Frith recognises this in his observation that 'a record.. as a sound, has a number of different authors'; but, having made this hugely suggestive comment he does little with it; with the effect that the issue of what, exactly, happens to a pop act and its compositions under these complex conditions of 'translation', remains essentially untheorised. Again, his good work stops short, a fact exemplified in his further specification of the variables that make up that context, as he writes,

> Singers provide the art, managers manipulate it into a saleable commodity and record companies give it a vehicle to ride on. The basic recipe for Rock success is sufficient talent, efficient management and an enterprising record company. (Frith, 1978, pp.76-77)

In a sense, given how obscure the real processes of pop can be (despite the mountains of pop journalism), Frith's identification of at least the broad groups of variables that make up that process, together with an overview of their principal interactions, did provide, in the earliest years of a coherent Popular Music Studies, a much needed light inside the 'black box' of record-making. What helped dim this light though is the fixity of his attention on the search for the ideology of Rock rather than the life of Pop. Certainly, Frith was subsequently to cast his net wider still (as the introductory observations on the scope of his published work indicate) but it is the pursuit of Rock ideology that leads him, in the work, continuously to raise questions that he subsequently fails to answer; where the failure to answer carries with it the return implication that the further development of the argument may have needed to be modified in the light of these unprovided answers. For example, when

considering 'singers' (or the musicians, composers or acts) who 'provide the art' in the pop-commodity equation sketched in the last quote above, he refers to their requiring 'the right attitudes and values' if success is to be achieved, but he never specifies what these are, or, more importantly, how musicians' and composers' internalisation of what they regard as the pre-requisites for commercial success might impact on their perception of what their creativity and their artistry should consist of when hoping to secure a recording contract. Similarly, Frith asserts high levels of failure amongst pop acts without ever asking what it is that the fortunate ones do that is different from the rest (if anything at all) and what it is they all do in relationship to how they create in the hope of winning record company approval; where this goal defines their *every* activity.

In his analysis, myriad questions go unasked of the interactions between the act and the intermediaries who represent the act to the company and of the intermediaries within the company who represent the commodified act to the market; despite the fact that all interactions in the pursuit of pop success have their bearing on what acts make records and on what records they make. For example, if we consider the role of the manager in relationship to what the act does and how it understands what it should do to further its life as a pop act, some of the questions Frith fails to ask are: how did the manager come to manage the act? Did the manager's style and opinions affect the behaviour of the act? How do managers define 'sufficient talent'? How do managers understand and practice efficiency? What does 'manipulating an act into a saleable commodity' mean and involve? How do acts know when a manager is being negligent or is lying to them and what do they do about it when they have schedules to obey? How does all this affect how acts as yet without managers understand what 'good management' is? Similar, and equally inexhaustive, lists could

be drawn up for the relations between acts, managers and record companies. Here, the questions we need most to ask would be, firstly, what are the effects of record company practice on how unsigned acts perceive creativity in commercial terms? Secondly, what is the effect of the 'culture' of record company practice on how pop acts conceive of themselves and their music? Thirdly, what is the effect on acts of changes either in personnel or in corporate philosophy? Answers to these, and to the many other unanswered questions suggested in the course of Frith's argument, may have a greater resonance for our understanding of commodification in the music industry than does the material he provides.

So great is the potential accumulation of unanswered questions in the S/R that, far from it being praised for its comprehensiveness, the work could be charged with a kind of busy superficiality, but this would be far too harsh a judgement. Even so, it does indicate the extent of the distance between the S/R as a pioneering work in the study of pop and the extent of the territory that the subject attempts to chart. A hit record begins its life in the creative imagination of a pop composer or composers and it becomes a hit because record companies not only manufacture pop records that carry that composition but they transform *some* proto-pop acts; and *some* proto-pop compositions into hit records. To characterise this composition-recording-release process as a 'chain' as Frith does (again after Hirsch) is to risk further confusion in an already complex area of combined activities. This is a risk, partly because the transformation process is so intense that, particularly within record companies, sequentially separable activities occur simultaneously; but more so because its usage fails to convey how dynamic are the interactions that pop acts experience and how many are the possible outcomes of those interactions; with success the least likely outcome.

Frith on the Record Market.

Selling a record, as Frith argues, demands the putting together of a marketing strategy. He constantly asserts the centrality of the market to Rock music but he does very little with the assertion; yet if what happens in the market-place is vital to the fate of Rock commodities (and vital also to Rock's place in popular cultural struggle) then the process for entry into that market-place must be equally vital. As we noted in chapter one, what a record company (or, properly, a record label) makes available to a newly-signed act is its team (not all of whom will have been involved or even consulted in the signing). This 'team', if this is not too crude an analogy, may be Spurs or they may be Ossett Albion; when an act signs to a record label, they automatically believe that the team is the former and are not disabused in any way, who would do this? Even so, the playing skills of the team, or the lack of them, quickly become apparent and in a variety of ways, all of which Frith ignores, yet all of these bear on how well texts are realised and acts commodified and, even more importantly, on how well they are sold.

Record companies are pleased when the acts they sign have a strong sense of themselves and of where they might be heading in market terms. What this means is that the entire commodification process is speeded up and is likely to be more effective because of its internal coherence. Even so, in every department of the record company, the act will encounter smaller, sub-teams who will want to retain a monopoly of professional expertise. These teams, as is the nature of the industry, will be made up of ambitious individuals who are carving out individual careers; as a consequence, they can use their 'professionalism' in quite contradictory ways - both for claiming their centrality in the production of success and in distancing themselves

from failure ('if only the act had listened to us') but the point is they *do* apply methods of working informed by company goals as an essential feature of the 'rules of production' of the record industry, which, again, Frith refers to but does not specify.

Similar deficiencies are encountered when Frith deals with the related aspects of record production. For example, he introduces us to the A&R department that signs an act and then helps to 'translate talent .. into a saleable product'. But we need to ask what is lost, and what is gained, in this 'translation'? Once 'translated', this talent passes on to the Marketing and Promotions departments so that the resultant commodity can be sold in the market-place; but if the record becomes successful, do we attribute this to its sound, alone; to the combination of the sound and the 'image' of the act; or, alternatively, is record success (simply) a consequence of the efficiency of these departments? If, as is likely, success is a product of all these factors working together then we still need to know what proportions obtain and how the 'chemistry' of interaction was initiated and controlled.

This last point is particularly important if we consider Frith's now familiar dictum: 'Records which don't sell .. don't enter mass consciousness whatever their particular artistic claims', of which dictum we are forced to ask whether or not an act is only as good as its record company? We need to ask this because, as we have noted, it is the record company's personnel and not the act, as such, that enters the commercial fray; but if the Promotions department fails to 'get a record away' (to use the argot of the record industry), that failure is perceived by the public as the failure of the *act* rather than the organisational failure of any combination of intermediaries either with the act or with each other. Further, and fundamentally, public failure then negatively affects that act's 'profile' both outside and *inside* the music and record industries. Not only might future sales be affected but the entire future of the act

might be called into question. Under these conditions, the act's morale, its creativity (and with it the chance of retrieving the situation), and, ultimately, its place in historiographical accounts of popular music can all suffer - not by its own actions (writing and playing pop music) but by those of others who make commodities of pop acts and pop compositions.

These kinds of criticisms can be raised at greater length and in greater detail at every turn of Frith's treatment of the recording and marketing processes. This is not to say that he fails to recognise that these interactions exist (cf. his objections to Rock acts as 'auteurs') but he does tend to ignore them or, what is more confusing, to refer to them in the negative without ever displaying how their negativity is worked out in practice. As a result, he weakens his own case that records have 'a number of different authors' and that they rely on 'contributions from a variety of forms of labour'. Not only does he not examine this controversial claim, he also separates the success of the record as a sound from the success of a record as a product when, arguably, both sound *and* product need to be successfully realised if the mass sales critical to success are to be generated. This failure to dig deeper into the interactions between the work and identity of individual pop acts and record industry practices, in general, is, then, a central source of weakness in the case made in the S/R.

Confusions in Frith's Argument.

To sum up, Simon Frith made a considerable advance in the study of Popular Music by attempting to demonstrate, in the face of elitist Mass Culturalist hostility, why that study was of value. As an academic and a Rock journalist, Frith needed to live a 'double life', so separate were the worlds of academic sociology and rock criticism he inhabited. Perhaps because of this Frith, arguably, over-compensates in

his determination to reconcile those two worlds: that is, to demonstrate to Rock critics that Sociology offered valid critical tools with which to criticise Rock; and to demonstrate to Sociologists that Rock was a subject that was worthy of study. In both instances, the need to validate Rock encouraged him to 'accentuate the positive' aspects of Rock, if not entirely to 'eliminate the negative'. What this means in practice, in terms of the construction of his argument, is that, in pursuit of the defining goal of the S/R, the unstated but clear desire to establish Rock's place in popular cultural struggle, Frith's overwhelming need is to identify, convincingly, the positive impact that Rock consumers have on Rock production decisions (which can only mean, in practice, on what to write, on who to sign, and on how to record). This need, as the preceding argument should have made clear, arises from the evident necessity to distance his argument from Mass Culturalism in all its forms and especially from its powerful, defining idea that 'he who controls the market controls the meaning'. Against this, Frith attempts to show that, as record company activity follows rather than leads patterns of musical use (rather than orchestrating the passive consumption of musical commodities, as in Adorno's account) this acknowledges the power of music as entertainment. This was not to argue that music has an essential, elemental power; but rather because to seek pleasure in any form of expression is to *refuse work.* Adorno was hostile to this notion; to use popular music as entertainment was not to refuse work but to re-locate its rhythms to non-working time. In order to show how capitalism is confounded, time and again, by hedonistic youthful innovation in the cultural sphere, Frith transfigures his signal recognition that music makers depend on intermediary figures into a relocation of intermediaries as 'intermediary institutions' that hover above youthful pleasure at once profiting from the supply of commodities for consumption and mindful that they must contain the

power of work-refusal lest it lead to the over-throw of the commodity system, the profit system itself. This is Marxist dialectics; it depicts, specifies, capitalism as a dynamic system of struggle between contending forces; but it is suddenly very unspecific about why some music becomes successful ('enters mass consciousness') and why most music intended for success never achieves this goal.

Frith's pursuit of Rock's existence as evidence of popular cultural struggle means that he has to display the essential *vulnerability* of the record industry in the face of consumer demand: record companies would dearly love to control demand for their products but they cannot; the 'needs' of consumers are 'independently expressed' with the result that, 'musical results have followed rather than led youthful tastes and choices'. Despite the persuasiveness of his case (a persuasiveness built of rigour and close argument) this notion of 'vulnerability' sits uneasily with the cumulative picture of the record industry that Frith constructs in the course of his analysis. Essentially, in the development of his meta-argument, (of popular cultural struggle) Frith needs to cast the record industry as a negative force against which the popular will is exercised. In order to be cast as a negative force of sufficient strength to excite popular struggle, the record industry needs to be shown, along the route of the analysis, to be of considerable strength, with the result that, when the conceptual tables are suddenly turned and the industry is re-presented as 'vulnerable', his overall position is undermined.

Conclusions.

Frith's argument is a powerful one and a necessary one: if pop was not always to be confined to the popular cultural trash-heap by academia then someone needed to demonstrate that its study was valuable. Frith accomplished this in the S/R and he

has gone on to become the most significant, individual figure in Popular Music Studies. There is not the space here to discuss Laing's contribution to early PMS or to what Frith took from Laing's analysis in The Sound of Our Time; neither is there space to consider, in detail the subsequent development of Frith's views and of those who developed parallel studies either in sociology or, equally importantly, in musicology. For the purposes of this study, the S/R tells us far more about how pop music is made than does either of its two main precursors; the work of Adorno and Hirsch, respectively. The S/R shows us that, as a music industry and a record industry are essential to the existence of popular music, then these must have their effects on what music becomes popular; and on what, how and why music is made. Frith refuses to draw 'pessimistic' conclusions from the industrial production of popular music products and he introduces us to the major 'intermediaries' who mediate between the act and the market-place. He shows us that pop is not made 'top down' as Adorno argued but he cautions us not to treat popular music texts solely as aesthetic creations. He is willing to confront the large-scale failure of pop acts and he makes the crucial distinction that mass sales are the only guarantee that music made to be popular is, in fact, popular music - and Frith does all of this while exploring an *aspect* of the development of pop music; the emergence of Rock as a powerful ideology amongst young people, and within society.

With all of the above in mind, it is still the case that the criticisms made of Frith in the body of this analysis must stand. It is precisely because Frith represents the making of popular musical commodities as a dynamic field of interaction between pop acts and intermediaries that he can be criticised - simply because he does comparatively little with this representation. There are real people in Frith's account of record-making, but he leaves them without animation; consequently by

leaving unanswered the questions that he fairly forces us to ask of the actions and motivations of those individuals his good work stops short. In the short pamphlet British Popular Music Research (1981), published four years after the S/R, Frith acknowledges some of these short-comings,

> 'I was aware of its research inadequacies .. and I hoped that it would encourage people .. to cover similar ground better' (Frith, 1981, p.13)

What is interesting about the overview he takes of the, then, contemporary condition of research into popular music is that he laments the lack of 'empirical research' but identifies the specific weaknesses of his own research in the S/R as, firstly, his failure to anticipate how the music industry would cope with a recession and, secondly, his failure to absorb the implications of rising youth unemployment for his depiction of the connections between leisure and music. These shortfalls are addressed in Sound Effects as are several others - most notably of all sexuality - but somehow in this re-working of the S/R he still fails to explore in any greater depth the key music-making and record-making relationships he identifies in the S/R, although he does provide more examples of them in operation. Again, the subsequent work of Frith is too protean to assess; however, his influence is particularly apparent in the first major British study of record company practices - Producing Pop by Keith Negus - to which we now turn.

Chapter Four:

Keith Negus and Producing Pop.

Introduction.

If Frith, at least in his very earliest work, did not go far enough beyond Hirsch's representation of the practices of record companies, Negus sets out not only to debunk Hirsch's view but any account of popular music-making, and the record industry's involvement in this, that is not alive to the way that all production decisions are now inflected by the need to search for 'global' markets. He does this by making a close study of how record companies work and of how 'day-to-day' decision making at a local level connects, eventually, with global aims. In this way, Negus's study is neither a cybernetic 'modelling' as was Hirsch's nor an extrapolation from industry statistics as so many other accounts of the pop process are. In all of these ways, Negus's work connects with the general thrust of this study - he is determined to consider what it is that record company personnel (or 'cultural intermediaries') do in their jobs on a daily basis that adds to, and so helps to transform, the raw material of popular music into pop acts with hit records. What is even more germane about

Producing Pop (P/P) is the way that Negus reaches beyond the creation of successful products that emerge from a process of collaboration between acts and different record industry personnel to show how 'conflict', as much as 'collaboration', and with it the failure that conflict can induce, is a defining feature of record company activity and experience (hence the book's sub-title, 'Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry'). In this sense, it is partly misleading to characterise Negus's recognition of large-scale failure as a 'by-product' of his argument, although I will argue below that he still fails either to connect his discussion of endemic conflict closely enough to this recognition or truly to explore failure as a phenomenon of significance. Before we consider his contribution to the understanding of the methods and practices of major record companies, it is important to register some of the broad, structural developments that occurred in the years between Hirsch's and Frith's studies of those methods and practices and Negus's much more contemporary examination of them.

Negus and Frith.

Negus is very much part of the 'second generation' of writers within PMS. With Moore and Cohen, Negus cites Frith's influence on his work and that influence is apparent in the course of (P/P) in which Frith is easily the most prominent secondary source. For all this, there are three major orders of difference between P/P and the S/R (beyond the obvious difference that Negus makes a deliberate study of record companies while Frith's primary focus is the rise and form of Rock Music).

(1). There are the differences that stem from economic and organisational changes both within the organisation of the record industry and within pop itself in the years between the publication of the S/R and P/P. These were hinted at in the introduction to chapter two. Frith's research for the S/R was conducted substantially

before the emergence of Punk Rock and the 'New Wave'. One of the key aspects of Punk was the emergence of independent record companies, of which 'Rough Trade' and 'Factory Records' proved the most durable. Even when they were relatively short-lived, companies like 'Fast Product' and 'Postcard Records' seemed much more responsive to the needs of audiences for emergent, often regionally-distinct, music that was considerably different from that made by the dominant mainstream acts signed to the majors. Ultimately, the independents could not compete economically with the majors, (although the notion of an 'independent' sector has persisted to this day). What the majors could guarantee was national and international distribution, promotion and marketing. The opportunity of maximising the chances of celebrity and earnings was not lost on Punk acts and most of the earliest, and most prominent, signed directly to major companies while others left as soon as major interest was made apparent (Rough Trade lost a host of acts this way). Even so, the fact that the independents could find new acts and sell records by them to a distinct, new market that expressed contempt for the premier pop acts of the day was not lost on the major companies. What they saw in the independents was exactly the ability to respond rapidly to emergent tastes, something that companies that had grown complacent with the Beatles-initiated pattern for market success (pop singles for pre-teens; albums for teens and twenties) clearly needed to learn from or, what was more immediate and convenient, buy into.

In the S/R, Frith's music industry was still the British industry pre-Punk. When Frith published Sound Effects, he incorporated the Punk experience not so much into his overview of how acts and companies together make pop records but more into his analysis of 'youth' as a social construct. Negus focuses far more clearly on the, by now, 'post-punk' record industry. This would still be dominated by the

majors but, in a sense, these major companies had lost their own independence despite (or perhaps because of) the considerable improvement in their fortunes initiated by the successful launch of the Compact Disc. The introduction of the Compact Disc allowed them to generate even more profit from 'catalogue' sales of the work of acts that had long since paid off the costs of production of their records and this profit was then re-invested to respond to the burgeoning need for video promos that, in turn, ensured that consumers could be reached by the majors through channels that independent labels found almost impossible to access. But if the independents could not economically supplant the majors, it was still the case, as Negus argues, that the majors responded to the *appearance* of their vulnerability by bringing a new sensibility to the record industry, one that expressed itself in new working methods that were designed to replicate the flexibility and closeness to consumer demands that the independents exhibited.

(2). A concomitant of the 'resurgence' of the majors (where 'resurgence' slightly over-states the case) and the rise of video as a promotional tool was the way that these conditions lead to a far greater presence of pop on television than had previously been the case. The development of satellite and cable systems encouraged the creation of a 'dedicated' and 'global' satellite music channel, MTV, and the success of MTV, in turn, (and in the context of Reaganite and Thatcherite 'deregulation'/'free-market' economics and the take-overs and mergers this stimulated (see Hutton, 1996) saw major record companies become swallowed by enormously powerful, globally-active conglomerates. These conglomerates were not necessarily solely media concerns; for example, Bertellsman's who bought, and merged, Arista Records and RCA Records, formed a 'Music Group' that it now describes as 'A Unit of BMG Entertainment', but its primary activity remained the production of

chemicals. Similarly, Sony purchased CBS Records but its 'core' business remained electronic hardware manufacture; as does that of Phillips who continue to expand the activities of 'Polygram' through acquisitions as significant as A&M Records and Island Records. In the same period, EMI bought up Virgin Records and WEA merged with Time Publishing to form 'Time-Warner'. Given the nature and scale of these developments, it would be unlikely had they not had an effect on record company activities and practices.

Again, Frith has analysed many of the developments in record industry practice - notably the increasing importance of the ownership and exploitation of copyright and also the rise (and the cultural analysis of the rise) of video. For Negus, what is central is the combination of these, and related, changes into the phenomenon of the 'globalisation' of Media industries, and with them, the record industry. This has posed new demands for record industry personnel. Instead of signing artists who make 'good' records (records with a 'hit' potential), they now need to be alive to the fact that the parent company has the ability to ensure that newly-signed acts from the record division can be broadcast live or on video on that conglomerate's T.V. stations, supply the soundtrack or even star in films made by its studios, be interviewed in its newspapers and magazines, broadcast on its Radio Stations and, increasingly, be offered as a 'multimedia' 'experience' on its Web-site (Negus doesn't analyse Digital Internet developments but his argument anticipates them). These developments, taken together, he describes as 'Media Synergy' based on the long-recognised phenomenon that the whole might be greater than the sum of its parts. Where record companies are concerned, they have needed to respond to these new demands by recognising that they can no longer sign simply 'Record Artists' but artists who can become transformed into a 'Total Star Text', an individual or group

that is comfortable with, and capable of generating, interest that is registered simultaneously through different but related media and throughout 'the world'.

As a primary consequence of these dramatic developments, Negus identifies a key shift in relative power inside major record companies, one that has come to favour the activities and judgements of the Marketing departments of major record companies over those of the A&R departments (traditionally any record company's dominant sector). In P/P, Negus weaves an elaborate and impressive argument around this assertion. Through it he connects the tensions created by these upheavals to impacts on pop acts who must now undergo a far more demanding process of transformation or, perhaps, systematisation, that prepares them for a commodification process that feeds a 'global' market through a large number of different points of access; so many that a co-ordinated cross- or multi-media campaign is demanded. Because of the new forms of conflict within record companies initiated by these changes in the commodification process new acts are particularly vulnerable and may become casualties either of their own conflicts with record company staff or of conflicts between competing departments (predominantly A&R and Marketing) who now hold competing views of what 'makes' a good act and what type of act is likely to develop and sustain the kind of career that generates the huge profits that justify their jobs. In either event, an act can fail to make it through the commodification process successfully, because they will suffer the consequences of one, or both, of these kinds of conflict.

(3). If there have been significant changes in the conditions of the production of popular music since Frith's S/R, then, equally, there have been considerable developments in theories of the Media since the mid-1970's (though, again, PMS has been the 'poor relation' within this process). For example, and instructively, the S/R

was published as part of a Sociological series, 'Communication and Society' published by Constable. In a sense, this series was a harbinger of the huge upheavals to come as Media Studies and Communication Studies (as well as 'Cultural Studies' although this was already fairly well-defined) came swiftly to prominence within, and beyond, Higher Education in the 1980's. In a sense, Negus is the first researcher to apply a generalised Mass Communications argument to Pop; and, therefore, his is a work of Media Theory rather than Sociology, as was Frith's. This is important because, arguably, Negus has more specialised concepts to draw on, and certainly more research to support him than did Frith almost twenty years earlier. On this basis, when considering Negus's work more closely we need to appreciate that not only had the world of pop changed by the time Negus began his study, but how that world might be theorised had also moved on.

In all the literature on popular music it is Negus's work that comes closest to the concerns of this study; to the extent that his citation of the 'assessment' made by record company staff that,

> one in eight of the artists that they sign and record will achieve the level of success required to recoup their initial investment and start to earn money for both themselves and the company. (Negus, 1992, pp. 40-41]

helped sharpen its focus and create its momentum. Even so, while Negus's argument overlaps with, reproduces and parallels many of my own concerns, his analysis can be argued to be incomplete. It is through the identification of the nature and extent of this lack of 'completion' that some final account of the existing conception of record company practices and their connection with failure as the majority fate of pop acts signed to major record labels can be mounted.

The Primary Components of Negus's argument.

In his conclusions, Negus makes the following summary of his argument:

> Recordings (are) commercially successful because audiences have actively responded to them. .. The drive for economic success, and the need to construct markets, immediately implicates the audience in the composition and communication of popular music. Artists are commercially successful because audiences have made them so. .. The imperative of commercial success requires a market. but this market is not given, it is not simply "out there", it has to be made. It is made in the process of artist development. .. the sounds, visions and words of pop are decisively defined and produced in the process of artist development (that) I have defined as a web of working practices, dialogues and articulated relationships. (These inspire) 'habits of action' (Rorty) or 'orienting practices' (Bourdieu) which different staff employ as they negotiate these relationships. .. greater attention needs to be paid to the day-to-day work of people in the industry itself, because .. it is here where tensions between artists, consumers and corporations are mediated and find expression in a range of working practices, ideological divisions and conflicts. And, it is these which decisively shape the sounds and visions of contemporary pop music. (Negus, 1992, pp.153-154)

What concerns me is what Negus does with these insights; the combination of how he derives them and how he translates and connects them as the practical activities of music and record industry personnel to the making of successful pop records. In this I want to isolate how and why it is that, by fore-grounding his belief that conflict as well as collaboration informs record production processes, Negus falls short of analysing what he, himself, recognises as a principal factor in the pop 'equation', that most signed pop acts fail. Although no discrete analysis of all the constituent elements of P/P is possible here, five key structural components can be identified in Negus's argument (concepts that underpin the notions of 'Media Synergy', 'Total Star Text', and so on). I intend to consider each in turn and then draw general conclusions about how, so far, the relationship between pop acts and those who become involved

in the attempt to make pop music is represented in the literature on pop; and, further, what the connections might be between what industry personnel do in their working lives that connects with what most pop acts experience in theirs, which is to fail to achieve success.

1. Mediation and 'Cultural Intermediaries'.

In the discussion of Frith's S/R, the existence, necessity and methods of intermediaries had to be 'teased out' of the main argument; Negus, inheriting as he does the recent 'traditions' of Media and Mass Communication Studies has no need to develop an argument about the music industry that, eventually, introduces the role of the intermediary figure and institution; instead, he can assert their centrality from the second paragraph of his study:

> 'My focus is on personnel within the music business, rather than the artists or audiences, and my aim is to describe how a particular group of workers - who I have characterized as 'cultural intermediaries' .. - actively contribute to the sounds and images of pop'. (Negus, 1992, p. vi).

This paragraph incorporates an important disclaimer, namely that his focus is on neither 'artists' nor 'audiences', but I want to argue that, by not taking into consideration the part that acts play in the commodification process of the transformation of, predominantly, their own compositions into records, much of Negus's case is weakened - particularly when we consider that he insists that 'cultural intermediaries .. contribute to the sounds and images of pop'. The books title, Producing Pop, tends to represent the work as a comprehensive account of how pop is produced, and, despite the above disclaimers, Negus does tend to make his description of the work that intermediaries do and the context in which they do it,

together with their view of the pop commodification process, stand for the whole of record-making (or, at least, the whole of the non-playing aspects of it). On this basis, Negus's account is a distorted one - it is distorted because he fails to follow the logic of many of the insights into the relationship between 'cultural intermediaries' *and pop acts* that his argument contains.

For example, and in concert with the work of McQuail and others, Negus is keen to show that 'cultural intermediaries' are active in their mediation rather than passive 'go-betweens' who simply replicate already finished 'art objects' for a mass audience that waits patiently for the record companies to finish the work of replication and to advertise the results. In many ways this conception does mark a complete break with Hirsch's conception of how the record industry works; even so, Hirsch describes 'talent scouts' (the nearest he gets to the concept of the 'cultural intermediary') as 'pro-active'. Negus recognises this 'pro-activity' ('actively contribute to..') but somehow fails to develop its logic; 'somehow fails' because he ignores, ultimately, what cultural intermediaries mediate between - producers and consumers, acts and audiences.

If we consider the last point above more closely then, the 'pro-activity' of record industry personnel expresses itself in several distinct and decisive ways:

(a). Record company personnel choose those whom they wish to sign to make records from an enormous pool of contenders. Negus uses Cohen to indicate that this fact alone affects what acts do in their attempts to make music,

> 'Cohen .. is the only writer who has devoted detailed attention to the way in which "unknown" musicians are attempting to shape what they do to suit the demands of the recording industry, and the way in which the logic of "making it" informs local music-making'. (Negus, 1992, p. 41)

but he does absolutely nothing with this dramatic claim. What makes this claim 'dramatic' is that (and this comes uncomfortably close to Adorno's 'imitators') what aspirant pop acts can be argued to do is to not make 'art objects' at all but simply compose material, and conduct themselves in ways, that will attract record company attention - these are never 'artists' who have an original, expressive desire that record companies court in order to win the right to make replicas of their 'art objects', they are simply people who go 'fishing' for record company attention. If this is the case, (and it is an aspect of the life of pop acts that this study will be concerned to research), then what we immediately confront is the *power* imbalance that exists between aspirant acts and record companies, and the issue of differentials in power between intermediaries and acts is a dimension of popular music-making that Negus never truly broaches.

(b). Once 'selected', the relevant 'cultural intermediaries' will attempt to take the act through the experience of commodification in a relatively standardised way - 'relatively' because, while commodification always consists of the same elements (recording, press releases, sleeve art-work, and so on), different intermediaries will have their own strategies for involving the act in all these activities. Most of Negus's study is concerned with this recognition and its consequences - that commodification involves the passage of act and material through discrete stages; that different cultural intermediaries with different 'briefs' are involved; and that, such have been the upheavals in the global media industry, tensions and conflicts now exist between how these different intermediaries conceive and conduct their jobs. All of this is very persuasive and something of this aspect of the power of intermediaries (the power to define situations, the power to force acts to

obey pre-determined understandings of 'how the business works') has already been encountered in remarks about short-falls in Frith's account of the practices of intermediaries. Where these 'short-falls' connect with Negus's account is, firstly, that, while he recognises that the activities of record company personnel are informed by different, and contrasting types of 'working knowledge' (or 'habits of action', or 'orienting practices') and that this contrast is the source of conflict in what needs to be a collaborative process (again, hence P/P's sub-title), his over-looking the act's experience of all this leads him to fail to consider that conflict has *always* been a feature of the commodification process.

Essentially, there will always be a tension between the need for record company personnel to meet schedules and stay within budgets and the fact that they must integrate newly-signed acts into commodification on these terms. The pressures that personnel are under are threefold: they must integrate the act into the existing 'state-of-play' within the company; they must induce them to comply, as smoothly as possible, with their particular budgetary and temporal framework; and they must do this in a way that fits with their own conception, *and* with the company's conception, of how commodification should take place within that framework. This is demanding and the potential for friction between personnel with routines of their own and goals to meet, and acts with their own, unique conception of who they are and where they are going, should be immediately apparent. By 'discovering' conflict in the new, global context of record company activity, Negus fails to register that conflict is an 'industry constant' in the way that large-scale failure is. Because of this, he disconnects the exploration of his own recognition of failure from his account of this 'novel' conflict; and when he makes the 're-connection', in the book's conclusions, he

represents failures primarily as 'casualties' of conflict that are exceptional rather than the norm (see below).

(c). If record industry personnel, as 'cultural intermediaries', are powerful and pro-active, then acts must be powerless and re-active. Negus never makes this comparison and never explores its implications. Instead, his interviews are all with powerful individuals whom he allows to reflect at length about their experiences. As a piece of research, P/P is seminal in that Negus is the first PMS researcher to conduct such extensive interviews with record industry personnel, but, by determining to ignore the experience of acts, the account he derives from these kinds of reflections can only ever add up to a partial account of 'what goes on' in the commodification process. Unfortunately, Negus re-locates these partial accounts as *full* accounts of record-making and further distortions flow from this. For example, by concentrating on conflict between A&R and Marketing (see below) Negus represents these departments as continually reacting to each other, whereas, in fact, both departments are reacting to pop acts at different stages of the transformation of their material (and themselves) into commodities. Further, this fails, entirely, to take account of acts of solidarity *between* departments in disputes with pop acts.

We will need to consider organisation-employee relations at a later stage, but, whatever the differences between employees within an organisation (and the importance of the recognition that differences exist) A&R and Marketing personnel are still employees of a company and they understand, and will attempt to achieve, the goals and targets of that company. It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that they are at least as likely to present a 'united front' to pop acts in times of conflict as they are to conflict with each other.

(d). Negus opposes Hirsch, and opposes more casual accounts of record industry practice, when these represent 'overproduction' as a conscious industrial strategy. We have seen that Hirsch makes a reasonable case for overproduction and that Frith concurs with this view (translated into the colloquial, by Negus, as 'throwing mud against the wall'). This position has already been criticised because it fails to account for success and failure in individual cases. Negus rejects it out of hand. Under the conditions of 'media synergy' and the investment it demands, record companies can no longer afford to be so wasteful (despite the persistence of the 'safety net' of massive sales by any one act as the key to continued solvency). Presented in this way, a way that allows him to endorse what it is record industry personnel say about what they do, Negus makes a strong argument - except that he never ties his case against overproduction (it is too costly and cultural intermediaries are too professional to need it) to his recognition that everyone in the record industry works with the knowledge that only one in eight acts will succeed and that hits go on 'bank rolling' misses. Again, if he had considered the experience of acts, this conceptual disjuncture might not have arisen - the only people in the record industry who do not work on the 'one in eight' principle are pop acts and, often to a lesser extent, their managers.

(e). If intermediaries are pro-active and also hold power, the further consequence of their ability to define who will be commodified and how commodification works is that they never deal directly with acts; rather, as has already been argued (though not demonstrated) most negotiations between acts and record companies take place through managers. In this way, Negus presents a distorted, 'single tier' account of the mediational process. This is not to say that managers are absent from his account, but, again, because his focus is on A&R and

Marketing, he neglects the fact that managers will have their own culture of practice and their own power in relation to acts. Further, how acts have interacted with their managers - how they have developed their expectations and understanding of commodification (of making records and making hits) 'sets them up' for that process. This is the 'reality' of the act that record industry personnel need to deal with - acts are not 'blank sheets' on which the record company draws its design for success; rather, an act already has not only a conception of itself but one, also, of what to expect from record industry personnel. *This is not to suggest that only the most* compliant acts will prosper, far from it, only that commodification will run more or less smoothly on the basis of how the act interfaces, through its management, with the company. We now need to look more closely at Negus's analysis of the organisation of that process.

2. Negus's view of A&R and Marketing.

Rather like Frith, because Negus has a 'goal' in view (one beyond his immediate, descriptive concern at any one point), he needs to present relations and experiences through particular 'filters'. In the case of A&R, he emphasises its 'demographic', the age and background of its staff. In Negus's account, A&R is portrayed as a department dominated by men in their early forties whose first experience of the music industry came either as Social Secretaries at College or University or as (often unsuccessful) band members. Consequently, these people share, and therefore help to reinforce throughout the industry, a 'culture of practice' rooted in the assumptions of the Rock tradition (the ideology of Rock anatomised by Frith). Negus shows how the slowness of A&R practices and values to adapt to new conditions has contributed to the state of conflict within major record companies. On

the other hand, Negus also needs to show that their's is a conscious ideology, in the sense that they know why they do what they do, rather than pretend to any more mysterious set of insights as a vain attempt to cloak their instrumentalism, and to reconcile the tensions or contradictions that could be argued to exist between the 'artists' desire to make expressive 'art objects' and the companies' desire to make effective commodities. In the literature on PMS, this point has been articulated most recently by Stratton (1982a). As Negus puts it,

> Stratton .. interpreted (the) use of non-rational criteria as an evasive and mystifying tactic. This he suggested was part of the way in which A&R staff attempt to "reconcile the contradictions" that arise around art and commerce under capitalism. Stratton described record companies as confronting a conflict between "the aesthetic and capitalism" and argued that A&R staff attempt both to resolve and evade this conflict via a "subjectivist appeal to intuition". (Negus, 1992, p. 51).

Negus needs to deny this in order to be able to counterpose his identification of two, quite deliberate ideologies at work in the commodification process. In so doing he indicates that he is neither bound to argue the 'value' of Rock, (as was Frith) nor deny pop value (as did Adorno). Despite this, and without wanting to pursue the tangential demands of the 'Art versus Commerce' debate, it is still the case that, however 'pro-active', intermediaries are not creators. Despite their 'contributions' in the commodification process, they are never initiators - there *is* a tension they need to reconcile and it is one of *legitimacy.* The power of intermediaries is apparent, however they try to mask it. What is at issue in their relationship with acts is where that power is derived from, *artistically* (especially when it is clear to everyone involved that the primary root of their power is budgetary).

Negus shows how the work of A&R personnel is three-phased: they sign new acts, they 'introduce' them to the company, and they make records with them. Superficially, it would seem that this is the entirety of the record industry process; and, perhaps, at an earlier time it was, but as Negus rightly indicates, this is no longer that 'earlier time'; the upheavals of the 1980's have brought with them the new demands of 'media synergy' and the 'total star text'. Under these conditions, there is no longer a single pop music market to be fed, but many markets to be created. While A&R carry on in the 'old way' they come increasingly into conflict with the changed realities facing the marketing departments in the media-rich and media-hungry conditions of globalisation. Because they insist on older conceptions of what makes an artist likely to enjoy a sustained career, they tend not so much to emphasise the 'wrong' qualities in their signing decisions but to attribute them inappropriately (companies and acts want a long, productive life, A&R is too restrictive in its conception of what makes that 'life'):

> ..potential artists are classified in terms of two clusters of distinctions. I shall refer to these as the 'organic' and the 'synthetic' ideology of creativity. The organic ideology of creativity is a naturalistic *approach to artists*. .. *The seeds of* success are within the band. It is the record company's job to encourage and direct; to 'nurture' this act. (Negus, 1992, pp. 54-55).

Although he does not follow this example through (despite his citation of her as a 'total star text') Madonna is hardly a Rock act but she has proved vastly popular and has sustained her career over a ten-year period. In the terms of Rock ideology, Madonna would be a 'synthetic' pop act, good for a few 'hit' singles but unlikely to display the durability of quintessentially 'Rock' acts like the Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, Pink Floyd, Dire Straits, U2 or R.E.M. While A&R

continue to privilege 'organic' Rock values' over 'synthetic' pop ones, they will, Negus argues, continue to come into conflict with the Marketing departments of the major companies who are receptive to any artist who reaches them from any quarter and who possess the kinds of combinable elements (music, image, and a 'story') that might be translated, through apposite and sustained marketing campaigns, into the mass selling acts that companies depend on for their existence. Because he can identify these radically different conceptions and projects through interviews with record industry personnel, Negus feels justified in breaking with the earlier, Rock-based conceptions of ideologies of working practices that derive from the antinomies of 'Art versus Commerce' that Stratton argues.

Taken together, and when contrasted as starkly as they are above - where the 'demographic' of the A&R department with its related ideology of an unshakeable commitment to the 'organic' over the 'synthetic contrasts sharply with the seemingly more dynamic and contemporary instincts of Marketing, the likelihood that there will be conflict between people who hold such unrelated views of what a common business occupation should be about, is readily apparent. But Negus doesn't 'hold' his remarks here; he can't because record-making *is, after all, a 'common business* project' and A&R and Marketing people have to, and do, work together. As he struggles to account for this, for the evident fact that, however conflictual the beliefs and practices of A&R and Marketing may be, these departments continue to collaborate with each other and with pop 'artists' to make hit records, some of the further weaknesses of Negus's case begin to become apparent.

3. 'Artist Development' and its Contradictions.

Negus concentrates on the relationship between A&R and Marketing almost to the exclusion of all else in the Music Industry. As he argues,

> The relationship between artist and repertoire and marketing is at the core of the music business. The work of these departments and the relationship between them decisively shapes the way in which the sounds and images of pop are put together. It is the meeting point of a number of tensions which can be found refracted throughout the industry, and represents a wider set of orientations and practices than formal departmental categories imply. (Negus, 1992, p.63)

This seems to me to miss the point that what is at the 'core of the music business' is at least as much 'music' as it is 'business'. Frith shows convincingly that people take pleasure in music and, because they do, an industry that delivers musical products to them has developed to satisfy this enjoyment. Once established, we can examine the relationship between industry and audience or market from a variety of perspectives - as Adorno does (creativity is corrupted by industrialisation); as Hirsch does (this industrial method is wasteful); as Frith does (industrial control over production is problematised by the uses made of their products by consumers); and as Negus does (the industrial process is not plain-sailing, efficiency is marred by conflict). Negus's case is not invalid because it does not consider the experience of musicians, but the virtual absence of musicians from the account makes it less than definitive. He can 'safely' leave them out because the power of the industry, and these departments in particular, is so impressive. Instructively, though, he represents that power in a benign and muted way.

When discussing how A&R personnel view their role, Negus uses the term to 'nurture' to describe what it is that record companies do with 'artists'. This is

consistent with the ideological belief in the 'organic' nature of their role described above, but because they cannot always conflict, and must (and do) work together, Negus subtly shifts 'nurturing' to describe the entirety of commodification. He achieves this by replacing 'nurturing' with 'artist development' at a key stage in his argument; at that stage when he has to 'put back together' what he has treated separately (and conflictually) - the combinatorial and collaborative procedures of A&R and Marketing. This continual shifting between conflict and 'caring', rather than necessarily reflecting real tensions in the record industry, causes very specific tensions within his own analysis.

The term 'nurturing' is first used in the very first paragraph of his study when he quotes an 'interim report to shareholders' issued by the Polygram group in which Alan Levy, president of Polygram, observed that 'it is the initial discovery and subsequent nurturing of the artists which is the critical phase'. As Negus writes,

> In this book I am taking the "critical phase" which Levy identifies - the discovery and development of recording artists - as my central theme, and using it as an organising principle to provide a more general account of the recording industry and production of pop music.(Negus, 1992, p. vi).

In a sense, and despite the earlier criticisms, the relationship between A&R and Marketing *is* 'the core of the music industry' because between them, these two departments bring acts into the commodification process and usher them through whatever it takes to transform them and their compositions into saleable commodities. Even so, there are numerous problems associated with Negus's address to, and identification of, the 'critical phase' of artist development which, in the context of comments already made, can be identified as follows:

(a). Negus's use of the term 'recording industry' fluctuates throughout the study. As previous remarks have indicated, he never draws a distinction between record companies and other music industry agencies. This introduces a confusion to the text that runs throughout its length. For Negus, it is only A&R and Marketing that count, despite his important recognition that there is a 'web' of relationships that connect acts with those departments that stretches to the furthest corners of music industry activity. The problem here is that the only intermediaries identified as of any importance by Negus are these specific personnel. When he comes, very briefly to consider other, significant intermediaries - most pertinently managers - his attention to the role they play in the early preparation of acts for the commodification *process* that A&R and Marketing conduct is, at best, superficial. What, for example, are we to make of the following remarks?

> Many unsigned acts who approach record companies have a manager who is little more than an enthusiastic, hustling friend. In such a case the manager is often learning how the industry operates at the same time as the artists. One partner in a management company who had achieved commercial success with a number of artists could look back and with a smile reflect on some "horrendous mistakes" that he had made on the way. Others however, may not recover from a lack of knowledge or errors of judgement. In the following chapters it will become clear that there are many points at which errors of judgement can be made. (Negus, 1992, p. 42).

As the notes on Frith should have made clear, acts depend on intermediaries to progress their career, but once dependencies have been established, the trajectory of that career is a function of the quality of the initial dependencies so formed. It is all very well for a successful manager to reflect 'with a smile' on his 'horrendous mistakes' but who bore the brunt of those mistakes, and would they reflect with similar affection on careers, and probably lives, that were ruined as this particular

manager grew from an 'enthusiastic, hustling friend' into a contemporary man of stature? Put differently, if 'cultural intermediaries' 'contribute to the sounds and images of pop', then Negus needs to allow not only that an act will be likely to have been working with intermediaries for a lengthy period before signing to a major record company, but that an act will have a more intimate relationship with some intermediaries than with others.

(b). Negus only returns to the term 'artist development' after much of his analysis of A&R has been detailed. Instructively, he re-introduces the concept after, first, showing how conflictual relations between A&R and Marketing have become. Further, he takes the concept from its application in the US recording industry - an industry whose activities are made more complex by the complexities of attempting to co-ordinate sales campaigns, simultaneously, across a sub-continent. He records this observation made in an interview with a 'vice president of artist development at a North American label',

> We used to be called product managers. That used to be our exact title. Our new president thinks that's an insensitive title, and I agree We are directors of artist development. *We're here to develop the artist's careers and sales potential. That's* why we've changed our titles, we're a little bit more sensitive. Product is kind of distant, it's almost too cold. (Negus, 1992, p. 63)

Again, there is much that is glossed in this innocuous sounding series of observations. Negus, after showing how distinct are the ideological conceptions of their respective roles held by A&R and by Marketing, now seeks to unite what they do as 'artist development'; but this quote (the only one that indicates why the term has gained purchase) does his argument a disservice. It does this in the way that it reveals how cosmetic the change in title is - nothing has changed materially in how the

intermediaries perform their tasks or conceive their roles, instead, only their title has changed not only to make those tasks and roles seem less 'cold' but, in fact, to 'sanitise' what intermediaries do. The fact that 'a vice president of artist development' can make these observations returns us to Stratton's conception of the intermediary attempting to conceal the tension between 'art' and 'commerce' by 'equalising' the roles of acts and intermediaries within the commodification process. In this instance, the intermediary legitimates his or her power in the transformation process by now being able to 'reassure' an artist that any decisions they may take are reasonable because they, too, are 'artists' of a kind.

The problem here, as elsewhere, is that Negus seems content not just to allow staff to speak for themselves but to define what goes on in the commodification process. In the absence of any account of 'how it was for them' from pop acts who have undergone this process (and most of them fail to be transformed into successful commodities) we are again left to ask, if these intermediaries are so effective, why is it that they produce so many failed commodities? The very concept of 'nurturing' needs to be confronted. 'Nurturing' is benign, it is what parents and carers do. As such, its use tends to put acts in the subordinate and dependent position of children, new-born children. This characterisation has its strengths. Acts are raw innocents when it comes to selling massive quantities of records of their compositions. But throughout his analysis, the 'authoritarianism' of the 'parental' record company comes through time after time. This is particularly evident in Negus's account of recording.

4. Making Recordings.

If 'nurturing' suggests 'care and attention', it also conveys a timeless, unhurried quality - an extremely inapt term to use where record-making is concerned. Further, 'Artist Development' has the same air of empathy and good-will about it, at least superficially, but, if we disturb this appearance of calm and begin to question the term more robustly then we are forced to ask at what point the intimacy it suggests becomes intrusion; when 'mutuality' or 'collaboration' is initiated, on whose terms is 'mutuality' defined; what aspects of an 'artist's' creativity are available for collaborative effort, and what are not? Again, these are issues of power. In his presentation of the actual business of recording sounds, Negus first presents this as 'the most explicitly collaborative process in the recording industry' (p. 80) but then switches, two sentences later, to this version of the same event:

> It is in the process of visual and musical production where artists and various recording industry personnel experience some of the greatest autonomy and liberty. It is in these areas where the control of entertainment corporations is often restricted to a semi-detached monitoring operation. Limits are imposed by imposing budget restrictions and retroactively modifying, mixing and editing the songs and videos which have been produced. (Negus, 1992, p. 80).

There is great confusion here. The 'artist developers' seem to hover outside the studio(s) while the 'artists' weave their magic within; but those outside 'hover' with the knowledge that they *own* what will emerge from the studio and that their ownership will allow them to 'retroactively' modify, mix and edit the 'finished' article into a form that *they* approve of. They can also call a halt whenever they want to because they hold the purse strings. In these, vital, senses, the use of the terms 'mutuality' and 'collaboration' not only mask, they misrepresent how power is

distributed in record-making. Negus acknowledges as much (see below), but he does not absorb the full implications of his acknowledgement of a process that is not one of the calmly collaborative contemplation of artistic development but of time- and budget-pressured commodification. As Negus notes,

> ..whether by design or default the final musical recording which appears on an album will have had contributions from artist and repertoire staff, producers, engineers, musicians and mixers, and will often have been composed in an ad-hoc way with considerable trial and error, experimentation and modification in the process. (Negus, 1992, pp. 92-93)

This is a radical statement when we contrast this conception of 'composition' with almost any conception of the same process presented in the work of Musicologists and it also marks a considerable move away from the conception of the 'Rock artist'; but this still has its deficiencies, not least that Negus uses this conclusion as evidence of the 'artist development' phase in action without conceding that the actions of intermediaries are, or at least, can be, intrusive and that no definite limits to the scope of their intrusion are allowed for in any definition of their relationship with pop acts.

Negus is torn between two recognitions: that the commodification of popular music is collaborative and, simultaneously, that it is prone to conflict. It would be unfair to observe that this observation is unexceptional because no researcher in PMS has so far made this case. Even so, because Negus's approach to his research was to concentrate his efforts on interviewing high-ranking record industry personnel he allows them to set the agenda. On this basis, and quite naturally, they want to legitimise what they do, they want to present their activities in the most favourable light, and this Negus allows them to do; but in the absence of an

account of the experiences of 'artists' or pop acts what we are confronted with is one side of a continuously conflictual relationship left to stand for the whole of that relationship. It is for this reason that Negus presents relations within the various stages of the commodification process so blandly, and 'discovers' conflict only when 'the rules' are not followed; we recognise 'conflict' as almost a state of permanent exceptionality - to the extent that his discussion of how conflict between acts and intermediaries affects the former's chances of success occupies little over a page towards the very end of his analysis and the only extended analysis of the market-failure of acts comes in the form of extreme examples: 'the politics of releasing crap', an interesting aside on 'political signings' (releasing records by acts that no-one has confidence in to appease other, related and powerful, acts or managers)

Despite the relative paucity of analysis (and with no examples beyond the last one above), Negus discusses the connection between conflict and market-failure through the startling revelation that if acts fail to do what intermediaries want them to do, the latter become 'demotivated'. As a consequence of 'demotivation', the artist development stage of commodification is completed unsuccessfully and failure in the market-place is the result. This recognition of the almost absolute power of intermediaries over the fates of pop acts is of vital importance in understanding how pop acts experience the commodification process, but because he listens only to the intermediary's presentation of why they might become 'demotivated' he fails to respond to his 'discovery' (as the limited discussion of the relationship testifies). He fails to register 'demotivation' as a powerful 'weapon' in the 'armoury' of the intermediary in the maintenance of control over commodification (ensuring 'standardisation' and inflecting it with a personalised conception of the process). Instead, each aspect of commodification is presented as a fairly unproblematic stage

in an ordered sequence (except when the contrasting definitions of that process *within the company* are engaged). But, because this is never unproblematic and is shaped by the play of contending forces not just within the company but between the company, acts, and their managers, there are power struggles at work and these create contradictions both in reality and in Negus's analysis. They can be identified in the following ways:

(a). Who are the 'various recording industry personnel' that enjoy 'autonomy' and 'liberty' with 'artists' in the process of .. musical production'? Negus identifies these as 'producers, engineers .. and mixers'. Without wanting to quote his entire section on producers (and ignoring engineers, although the 'sound' of recorded music really is down to their skill), it is fair to say that an act is unlikely to be given a free hand in the selection of a producer and a studio (that is if we accept that they want a producer in the first place). Further, it is not only the company that might have its views on who the 'right' producer for the band may be, the act's manager will have his or her opinion and the act will need to deal with the combination of pressures that comes from both these sources. Whatever happens, a compromise is the most likely outcome; and a compromise is always shaped by the relative power of the contending parties. What this means is that 'artists' rarely record on their own terms.

(b). Once chosen, who does the producer represent - the interests of the act; the interests of the company; or the interests of his or her own career? Again, where is the 'autonomy' and the 'liberty' of an act under these conditions? Even if they have won every argument thus far, they must still work with someone whose loyalties are, at best, divided; and they must answer for the results of a collaboration that, if they had been allowed to decide their own destinies, might not have arisen in the first place. To add 'mixers' to the equation is, then, misguided. By his own argument,

'mixers' (or, realistically, 're-mixers') are brought in by companies to *alter* the sound presented to them by the act, the producer and the manager. (This, of course, is truer of Rock acts than dance acts; and of Britain rather than the USA). The act then stands or falls by a sound that it may not agree with or even like.

(c). Whatever the loyalties of the producer and the morale of the act after conflicts over issues of production and recording have been resolved, what compromises the 'autonomy' and 'liberty' of the act to the point, arguably, of their non-existence, are the crucial, contextual conditions of budget, time-scale and contractual 'final say'. Negus draws our attention to two of these conditions (but makes almost nothing of them); I would argue that they help define the entire field of relations between pop acts and intermediaries and are impossible to ignore in any account of popular music-making. Again, acts stand or fall by commodified versions of their work, where these 'versions' will have been produced under conditions that, at the very least, will *not entirely been of their choosing. This recognition needs to be* factored into any account of popular music-making. By concentrating only on record company personnel, Negus misses the conflict and tensions that lie at the heart of the commodification process in a work that *concerns itself* with conflict and tension.

5. Contracts, Budgets and Prioritisation.

When discussing the relations between the A&R department and an act recording its album Negus gives a quite contradictory account of the decision making process that culminates in the finished work. He depicts the role of the A&R representative, perhaps more explicitly than anyone so far in PMS, as one of working,

> with a newly-signed act in transforming .. music into a commodity form suitable for reproduction on discs and tapes and broadcasting across various media. (Negus, 1992, p. 80).

He then identifies the two extremes in the performance of this role as either 'casual' or 'interventionist' and 'autocratic' in order to present the majority as working 'between these extremes'. As Negus puts it,

> Most A&R staff favour a facilitator role, acting as a catalyst by offering encouragement and criticism, and linking the act with various parties who may be able to assist in their musical development. (Negus, 1992, p. 80)

To illustrate this he quotes one A&R director who compares the role with that of a 'football manager', as someone who recognises talent and knows how to help 'develop and bring it out'. Again, the role is represented reasonably, as benign and almost avuncular - this football manager is an old school, unruffled and genial Joe Mercer, not a driven and anxious character constantly checking results and looking over his or her shoulder for the threat of redundancy. And yet the parallel between the record industry and football management is not as prosaic as it might first appear. Perhaps more than any other economic sector, the 'development' staff (to briefly concede Negus's term) are more vulnerable than comparable staff in other commodity producing industries for the reason that the commodities they produce stand or fall as 'successes' within a week of their launch. Most commodity manufacturers prepare the marketing launch of a new product for a considerable period in advance, and they employ market researchers at every stage of design and planning to go on checking that a market will exist once production has been initiated. Even where other *media* industries are concerned, the 'Daily Mirror' or 'Eastenders' does not have to prove itself anew with each printing or broadcast, but every release, even by an established

artist, is subject to enormous competition and the relevant company will make judgements about its likely success or failure in little more time than it takes in the case of new acts.

A&R and Marketing staff combine to commodify the music and appearance of acts that, certainly at one time, would have been the choice of A&R working alone. Negus makes a strong case for the arrival of acts at record companies by routes other than those of A&R 'scouting', but A&R still have the job of negotiating an act's progress through the commodification process. Superficially, at least, everyone involved in the process is committed to the notion that this, or any, signed act will sell large quantities of records. Negus builds a convincing case for the justice of this observation. In turn, it forms much of his case against 'overproduction' as a strategy (commodification costs too much, personnel are professionals not 'mud slingers'). Even so, we know that it is impossible for every release by every company to make the charts (there simply aren't the places) and, as most people buy records that are already in the charts, a chart placing as soon as possible after release is vital for the life of a record release. If a development team goes on failing to achieve chart positions for their acts then their jobs are at risk. Given the number of commodities that they release each week, it is unlikely that staff will draw up a new and innovative marketing and promotional strategy for every item. This means, in turn, that, at the very least, development teams, if they are successful, will attempt to systematise the commodification process in order to sustain success; if unsuccessful, existing staff will imitate the routines of others and will also adapt to the methods of incoming staff who will bring with them the practices that have made their reputation. There is then a curious and extreme dichotomy between the need to initiate and the need to conserve at play within record companies; and always under extreme pressure. One

'coping strategy' of this highly-pressured and dichotomised environment is not so much to 'over produce', rather it is to 'over sign' - to initiate the commodification of a number of commodities but to choose to concentrate marketing and promotional resources on only a proportion of these on the basis of 'intelligence' garnered from the market place. Here is not the place to discuss the methods of generation and the quality of this 'intelligence' but that it's application guides decision making inside record companies is recognised by Negus when he discusses the need for record companies to prioritise their resources.

The point was made in the first chapter that record companies will have many acts signed at the same time and that there will always be an inequality of attention between acts because of the need to address the needs of acts who will be at different stages of the recording and release process. If urgent situations arise, or a 'bottle-neck' occurs, then attention and resources are likely to be concentrated where, in the company's opinion, they are needed most. Newly-signed acts might imagine a consistency of attention from a record company (the 'nurturing' process) but the reality may be far removed from this, and not only in exceptional circumstances. A&R staff are particularly compromised by this because they act as 'intermediaries' between the act and the company, they are, therefore aware of company decisions with regard to prioritisation, they will even collaborate in them. This means that they may be forced to work on projects that, if they are not already 'dead', are certainly mortally sick because resources have been earmarked for other acts or because of hostility or indifference from other sectors. Negus indicates much of this but fails to display that the act is very unlikely to be made aware of these decisions, either by A&R or manager (who would want to pass this information on?) and continues, throughout his argument, to give the impression that somehow all this decision

making is transparent and that acts are party to it all. But if acts were party to such information then it is reasonable to suggest that they might fight these decisions, or change their practices with regard to the company.

It is because they are 'commodities' that acts are not informed on decisions of commodification, despite their need to assist in that process. What this means for pop acts (and particularly for new signings) is that they are always reacting to decisions that have been taken without their knowledge; they work, at best, on incomplete understanding of what it is they are involved in. Their 'power' resides only in the expectations that others have of them; once these are destroyed in some way, the 'autonomy' that Negus attributes to them is quick to evaporate. It can evaporate because a recording contract is exactly that, a contract to record, not to release, market and promote. Negus shows that the contract establishes the company's ownership of the product and he exemplifies what 'ownership' can mean for a record when he discusses the likely reception of a record by a company -

> Once the sessions in the studio are complete copies of a final mix will be submitted to the record company. At this point there can be three possible responses to what has been recorded. (Negus, 1992, p.91)

In enumerating these 'responses' Negus argues that the record company's outright rejection of a record will be rare but that 'the most common response' is that 'certain changes are needed' and that 'these changes often involve minor modifications and re-mixing'. As we have already noted, what passes him by is the contradiction between his representation of the need for A&R to practice 'covert surveillance' 'at the door' of the recording studio (behind which 'artists and producers .. enjoy a large degree of liberty') and the company's total power over what is

accepted as a record and over what is released and how it is promoted. Rather than present the anxieties of A&R staff as continuous with his belief in their 'nurturing' approach to record-making (the anxious father pacing outside the delivery room) Negus would have done better to locate recording more firmly within commodification - where 'covert surveillance' by A&R is a function of their need to ensure that budgetary and time limits are adhered to. Again, Negus draws our attention to these limits on the activities of 'artists' ('Limits are set by imposing budget restrictions') but he doesn't factor them into the experience of acts under the new and decisive pressures of making records for major labels.

Record-making, release and promotion can be likened to take-off and landing schedules at international airports. A time-slot is identified for departure, the necessary maintenance and boarding procedures are initiated and, once completed, the air-craft is cleared for take-off. If, for whatever reason, there are delays which prevent take-off then the aircraft must wait until another 'window' arises - and departure delays can sour the mood of passengers and crew alike as well as make for disruptions in schedules at the 'other end'. Where this analogy breaks down is that complete cancellation (the withdrawal of service) is almost unheard of in the world of air-travel, passengers know that, eventually, they will arrive at their destination. Pop acts can't enjoy this security. 'Prioritisation', reinforced as this is by the right of disposal over recorded products guaranteed by the legal ownership of the product, ensures that the careers of pop acts may not only be subject to delay, they can be cancelled with no redress. Negus discusses disruptions to the expected and anticipated release or records in his conclusions but, as previous remarks have indicated, he tends to treat these disruptions as comparatively rare and exceptional - 'failure', then, is re-located to failure in the market-place, which Negus doesn't

discuss. Yet, one of the main components of his case is the reverse of this, that markets (and, thereby, consumers) are 'made in the process of artist development'. If only one in eight acts succeed then failure is not exceptional, it is overwhelmingly the primary product of the record industry. Further, by this logic, failure is an outcome of production rather than consumption and it can be traced to the phase of 'artist development'. The final twist is, then, because intermediaries make acts responsible for their own fates - in the sense that, unless they comply with the demands made of them, acts can 'demotivate' intermediaries - acts, largely powerless though they are, can be represented as the authors of their own downfall.

Conclusion.

Negus's analysis takes us directly inside the offices of record companies and concentrates our attention on two, key departments within the record company - A&R and Marketing. His work is to be praised for this and for offering such a comprehensive account of changes to, and within, record companies since the mid-1980's. For all this, several important flaws have been to argued to exist both in his analysis and in his approach to his field: most notably, for the purposes of this study, that Negus at once identifies the huge failure rate amongst signed acts, but then fails to explain either why this failure rate should have come to exist or, truly, why it persists - especially when he argues *against* 'overproduction' as defining feature of record industry practice, and *for* the 'developmental' competence of the staff he interviews. In some ways, then, despite the much narrower focus of his work, Negus tends, as did Frith before him, to raise as many questions about record-making as he answers. Before we can ask some of those unanswered questions here, we need to be clearer about the method of their asking.

Chapter Five:

Further Questions of Method.

Introduction.

Popular music is big business, it is also culturally pervasive, yet we continue to know comparatively little about how it is made. This study is organised around the search for an answer to a single question - why do so many pop acts signed to major record labels fall to make records that become hits? Pop fans very often pride themselves on their knowledge of pop music - the pub 'pop quiz' has become a staple of popular culture - but when we begin to look for hard information on why so many acts come and go we are immediately faced with the fact that there are very few sources on the realities of how acts are signed and records made. For example, the music press exists as little more than a consumer guide to new releases, but even the 'specialist', trade press fails to offers much more than puff pieces on company 'progress' and inadequate statistical compilations of company performance.

So far, in the determination to understand why 'less than one percent of acts' (Cohen) is signed by record companies and, then, why seven out of eight of them fail to make money (Negus) we have sought answers in the main, academic

studies of the music industry even though it was clear at the outset that these would be found wanting - given that, in part, this study is motivated by the fact that these works recognise the profligacy of the music industry without ever explaining it in any detailed way. Even so, each study, in its way, addresses the fact that popular music is the result of the combination of musical creativity and industrial capital and, to this extent at least, draws our attention to the process of the production of popular music as a likely place to research the roots of the failure to make successful commodities.

Of the theorists so far considered, only Negus explores the actual practices of record companies. Of the others, Adorno pours scorn on them, Hirsch abstracts them to the point of sterility, and Frith, while making numerous important connections between capital, musicians and consumers, tends to treat those important relationships comparatively sketchily. Negus's work stands almost alone in identifying who does what, and why, inside a record company but, in the previous chapter, his work was extensively criticised. It was criticised mainly because, in the absence of an account of the place and experience (or range of potential experiences) of pop acts in the commodification process, his portrayal of record company practices can be argued to be dangerously one-sided. This acknowledged, it would be foolish to be dismissive of Negus's work; record companies work with pop acts to make pop records and we cannot hope to identify why so many pop acts fail, and fail in the production process rather than in some 'fair-fight' in the market-place, without having an overview of record company practices. Negus offers this overview and his work will remain a point of reference in the attempt to make a more specific identification of a method of inquiry into the experience of failed major signings. As an aid to the development of such a specification, it would be useful to summarise what has been learned of record-making from the literature so far considered.

1. Hirsch, Frith and Negus all portray record company personnel as 'pro-active' and Negus even argues that these 'cultural intermediaries' 'contribute to the sounds and images of pop', but not one of the three truly addresses the logic of this mediational 'pro-activity' - which can be reduced to the core recognition that commodification is a transformative process. Whether they add to, subtract, or even detract, from the pop act's raw material, intermediaries *change* it in some way. Whether it is these 'changes' that lead to failure, or the ways that change is brought about, is a matter for inquiry, here we need to recognise that commodification is intrinsic to popular music and that process impacts on product.

2. The issues of who, exactly, the intermediaries are that work with pop acts, and, also, *how* they work, featured significantly in the preceding exploration of the work of Hirsch, Frith and Negus. All three theorists were criticised for their treatment of the roles, practices and motivations of intermediaries - but for very different reasons in each case. Again Hirsch's portrayal of the role of record company personnel was seen as schematic at the very best, even so, we still gain from his portrayal a sense of intermediary 'pro-activity'. Frith's portrayal improves on that of Hirsch, but only just: Frith was criticised for raising far more questions about the roles and practices of intermediaries than he answers. In a sense, the same criticism is made of Negus, despite his determination that we should appreciate just how central intermediaries are to the commodification process. If we consider what is common to the criticisms made of these three writers then what emerges is the consistent complaint that all three are too general in their comments because each effectively ignores the fact that intermediaries work with pop acts and that to treat the activities of intermediaries in isolation distorts the understanding of their role and methods so created. We can break this criticism down into three constituent parts:

(a). Not all intermediary figures that pop acts connect with are employed by record companies, yet all intermediaries will argue their necessity on the basis of a claim to understand how best to realise the act and its material as a successful commodity. Acts need intermediaries but they have no immediate method by which they can verify the expertise of those intermediaries or effectively monitor their activities - acts are disempowered in their dealings with intermediaries, whoever they are.

(b). All intermediaries develop working practices and they develop methods of organising tasks and of justifying their methods of organisation. Negus uses the expression 'habits of action' or 'orienting practices' to express this. I prefer to describe the combination of what intermediaries do, and how they justify what they do, as a 'culture of practice'. Observations in the first chapter referred to the distinctiveness of record-making as cultural production in terms of the need to progress matters through discussions that are imprecise and esoteric - all parties to commodification must discuss sound and its potential and all such verbalisations are both approximate (what does 'funky' really mean, for instance?) and speculative (no-one can read the future so how does anyone truly *know* what a hit sound, or a hit act, is?). In record-making there can be no reference to blue-prints, to measurements or to colour charts as there can be, for example, in car manufacture - but neither can participants refer to, and change, scripts or camera angles. On this basis, conflict is endemic, not only for the reasons outlined in chapters one and four but because the 'culture of practice' of music industry intermediaries is an 'aggressive' one in that they must always assert their necessity and their expertise as the basis on which they guide acts through commodification; and assert, also, their 'right' to make creative decisions within commodification. Further, they constantly 'gamble' with their reputations

through the success or failure of the acts they work with. This can only contribute to tension and supply kindling for conflict.

(c). Because they are 'pro-active', intermediaries will affect how acts perceive other intermediary figures and agencies. Further, intermediaries tend to negotiate with each other *in the name of* acts and their material. In this way, Pop acts are not party to all the decisions taken in their name. In a sense, then, acts are doubly-disempowered - not only can they not defend their own 'sphere of competence' (because they need to admit intermediaries to it), they cannot ever fully know what intermediaries have decided in their name because they must rely on exactly those people who have taken the decisions to report back to them.

3. Negus is the only one of the theorists considered so far to identify conflict as a constituent feature of commodification. This is an important recognition and some of the sources of that conflict have been referred to above. Again, it was argued in the previous chapter that Negus's treatment of conflict is, ultimately, under-developed but it is still the case that he connects conflict inside commodification to the eventual failure of commodities. In pursuing this insight in the experience of pop acts we will need to find out whether acts that fail experience more conflict than acts that succeed or whether some acts have less resistance to conflict than do others.

At base, this study is informed by a combination of observations from Frith and from Negus. Frith argues that 'records are the result of complex formal organisations' and Negus argues that 'greater attention needs to be paid to the day-to-day work of people in the industry itself'. I indicated that Frith under-estimated the complexity of the 'organisations' that make pop music and I hope to clarify this, below; here I would endorse the remainder of Negus's observation:

> ..it is here where tensions between artists, consumers and corporations are mediated and find expression in a range of working practices, ideological divisions and conflicts. And, it is these which decisively shape the sounds and visions of contemporary pop music. (Negus, 1992, p.154)

Paths to a Method.

The point was made in the first chapter that all inquiries are driven by methodological assumptions, whether stated or unstated. Some preliminary observations were made there about the nature of this inquiry - that it is sociological in character and that its preferred methodology is, broadly, qualitative in kind, but what was also indicated was my belief that the adoption of any qualitative methodology on my part is problematised by my having prior experience of what I propose to study. Before examining this specific question of method in any greater detail, the further point needs to be made that a methodological bias is apparent throughout the preceding analysis of studies of record-making; this should be conveyed by the choice of quotes from Frith and Negus that ends the preceding section.

In endorsing Negus's determination to study the 'day-to-day work of people in the industry', and after roundly criticising him for paying incomplete and insufficient attention to those activities, it is apparent that I have implicitly endorsed an interactionist perspective; more than this, I am concerned with how interactions, within organisations, *produce* those organisations. Before considering this somewhat cryptic claim any further it is worth examining some of the methodological problems associated with this chosen field of inquiry.

As remarks in the first chapter argued, to ask a question and to contextualise that 'asking' is to mobilise unstated assumptions through unexplicated methodological practices. Simply to choose a research topic is to have already

decided that the topic is interesting and that its study will be of value. No research topic 'drops out of the sky', researchers elect to study a topic because they already know something of the field and have located 'gaps' in existing research, anomalies in existing arguments, or are driven to develop new analyses because either new information is available or they believe they know how to generate new data. In introducing this topic, I have already tried to make explicit my 'prejudices' or at least acknowledge that I may have pre-judged issues *because of my experience of making* pop records. Even so, it was the need I felt to research that experience that caused this study to be mounted.

What brought experience and research together was that, when I became aware that pop was now a legitimate area of interest in Higher Education and began to read the existing literature, I could not recognise my own experience in that literature. It seemed to me, therefore, that I had experienced a 'process' of making records (I intuitively opted for that description, before the publication of Negus's P/P) and that, while the existing literature on pop was very diverse, certain 'orthodoxies' seemed present within it. Put crudely, musicological accounts of pop seemed entirely unaware that what we hear as the work of a composer is the musical work *after* all the pressures of the commodification process have been brought to bear on composer(s) and the work; equally, various sociological accounts (but especially Frith's S/R) seemed not to know how to connect outcomes (records) with process (commodification) despite working from a recognition of the combination of the two.

My aim was to explore what I saw as a disjuncture between what I called, 'Process' and 'Orthodoxies'. I intended, initially, to study the very different experiences of three signed acts: 'The Bible', 'Deacon Blue' and 'Meet Danny Wilson'. All three acts had come to public attention at roughly the same time and they played a

comparable style of music - the influence of the US act 'Steely Dan' was apparent in the music of each act and Deacon Blue had taken their name from a Steely Dan song. Further, I had access to one of these acts, The Bible. They, too, were managed by Marcus Russell. I listened to their early material and discussed his proposal to manage them; I attended some of their earliest gigs and I came to know the members of the act reasonably well. At the time, of the three acts in question, The Bible were likeliest to gain success (their single 'Graceland' was a 'radio hit' but not yet a chart entry). Meanwhile, Deacon Blue seemed to be attracting the least favourable press attention of the three acts. Soon afterwards, and after signing a deal with Ensign records that Russell described as 'mega-big', the making of the second Bible album seemed to run into trouble. Producers came and went, band members left or were sacked and the record was subject to very long delays. In the meantime, 'Meet Danny Wilson' had a hit with 'Mary's Prayer', but neither followed this with another hit nor managed to achieve a hit album. Deacon Blue, on the other hand, seemed the object of a sustained and inventive marketing campaign and became one of the most successful acts of the early-1990's. Ultimately, the second Bible album made no impact on the charts and the band broke up during the preparation of its third album.

What caused me to change my research to the acts I will shortly introduce was my increasing recognition that I could not set aside my own record-making experience in the attempt to research the experience of others. Not only was my access to at least one of the above acts a product of my position as a 'band member', but my approach to the other two acts was 'allowed' by that status also - from a familiarity with 'go-betweens' (I had access to CBS - Deacon Blue's label - because the Managing Director of Arista had formerly been head of marketing there and he could introduce me to staff; I could 'work on' access to Meet Danny Wilson by

similar routes); to the legitimacy that the limited success that Latin Quarter had achieved afforded me in discussions with other members of pop acts. I explore these conditions below, here what is at issue is that I realised that what I would have been taking to others was my own experience and what I really needed to do (and wanted to do) was to 'piece together', and then theorise, that experience.

In broad terms, 'piecing together' the experience of a number of people involved in the making, not just of objects but relationships, is the work of the ethnographer. Once again, I 'imagined' that I was engaged in an ethnographic study before I had come to consider what such studies demand and consist of. Over time, I decided that, although connected with ethnography, much of what I was attempting to do was not ethnographic, as such. Consequently, I have needed to 'search for a method'. In this way, much of the early part of my research was not about answering a question about popular music but of finding a way to *ask* a question. Even so, from the beginning, I have remained mindful of the demands of ethnography, and of 'qualitative research' in general. Sara Cohen has argued the case for a greater commitment to ethnography in PMS and has outlined its contours where researching and explicating popular music-making is concerned. In 'Ethnography and popular music studies' (1993) she makes an observation of considerable relevance to this study and to the introductory remarks to this chapter in particular,

> Whilst significant advances have been made in our understanding of issues surrounding popular music production and consumption, it will be suggested that particular emphases in popular music studies (e.g. upon music as commodity, media, capital and technology), and a reliance upon theoretical models abstracted from empirical data, and upon statistical, textual and journalistic sources, needs to be balanced by a more ethnographic approach. Ideally, that approach should focus upon social relationships, emphasising music as social practice and process. It should also be comparative and holistic; historical and dialogical; reflexive and policy-oriented. It should emphasise, among other things, the

> dynamic complexities of situations within which abstract concepts and models are embedded, and which they often simplify and obscure. The social, cultural and historical specificity of events, activities, relationships and discourses should also be highlighted. (Cohen, 1993, p. 123).

Clearly, Cohen follows her own advice in Rock Music in Liverpool, the book is informed by all of the considerations she outlines in her article. Further, it contains a synopsis of the misfortunes of two signed acts, 'Just William' and 'The Rhythm People' that encapsulates much of the approach of this study - by discussing the reactions of the acts to the contracts they had signed and by indicating how precarious was their status as signed acts (neither act made a hit record, neither released an album). The major divergence between this study and the methods it employs and Cohen's study and approach, is that hers was a 'text-book' exercise in ethnography. As she describes it:

> .. ethnography .. is the description and interpretation of a way of life (or 'culture'). It involves a micro-sociological focus upon beliefs, values, rituals and general patterns of behaviour ... ideally (it) involves a lengthy period of intimate study and residence with a particular group of people, knowledge of the spoken language and the employment of a wide range of observational techniques, including prolonged face-to-face contact with members of the local group, direct participation in some of the group's activities, and a greater emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary and survey data. Basic to the conduct of research, therefore, is the development of relationships "in the field". (Cohen, 1993, p. 124)

Arguably this study seeks to fulfil many of the criteria Cohen is concerned that PMS embrace. Music has been considered, thus far, as 'social practice and process' and the 'dynamic complexities' and social, cultural and historical specificity of events, activities, relationships and discourses' form an implied and often explicit 'touchstone' in the mounting of the research focus and in the critique of relevant secondary texts. Similarly, it will come to involve 'a micro-sociological focus upon

beliefs, values, rituals and general patterns of behaviour'. But, both in the choice of the 'particular group(s)' to study and also in the method of study of those 'groups' there can be no 'lengthy period of intimate study', nor can there be 'residence', equally, there can be no 'prolonged face-to-face contact with members'. Again, I am concerned to discover why signed acts fail to achieve success and I am searching the production process (rather than making unresearchable cultural assumptions about the consumption process) for clues to an understanding of what obstacles signed acts experience in that process. Fundamentally, I am researching the experience of acts 'after the event', acts who have passed through the process; more than this, I am researching my own experience of that process - neither of these procedures fulfils the criteria identified, not only by Cohen, but within the general literature on qualitative methodologies.

Cohen identifies a range of terms 'used to discuss research of an ethnographic type': 'fieldwork', 'case study', 'micro-sociology', 'interpretive procedure', 'symbolic interactionism', 'life or oral history', 'network analysis'. In a sense, by asking people to recount their record-making experiences I am engaging in the construction of 'life' or 'oral history'. In these exercises, I have to be aware of my position as researcher and to make explicit my methods for generating data (making contact, conducting interviews, and so on). When it comes to my own experience, however, this procedure becomes more difficult; consequently, I believe it necessary to establish how the criteria that 'validate' research and the data collected through it are established in this case. Essentially, in all cases I am researching a process after that process has been completed. This, in itself, is not unusual - all history is written after the event - and perhaps I should concern myself with the methodologies of 'history' rather than ethnography as applied to popular music. The reasons I intend to

remain with sociological and anthropological research methods and issues are, firstly, that I am not working to or from statistical sources (beyond the recognition of the high failure rate amongst signed acts); and, secondly, that qualitative methods are the most suited to reveal, through micro-sociological procedures, how (as Cohen quotes)

> institutions, social relationships, and economic practices .. are the subject of multiple differentiated actualisations by individuals and groups within their respective environment. (Grenier and Gibault, 1990, p. 389 in Cohen, 1993, p.132).

What problematises this aim is the inclusion of information about myself and my own experience of the 'actualisation' of the 'social relationships and economic practices' of making pop music within the 'institution' of the record industry during the 1980's. Before turning to consider this, I need first to consider why I should have already made wider methodological assumptions about the centrality of the need to consider record-making from the perspective that concentrates on interactions between organisational actors and actors that enter organisational frameworks.

Organisations: Theories and Methods.

Reference has already been made in the first chapter to the bare 'facts' of my membership of the pop act 'Latin Quarter' and to its history of making records. In the 'case histories' that follow (I choose this term rather than 'case studies' for reasons explained below) I concentrate on the making of albums by the acts Respect and Roadhouse. I then follow this with the case history of Latin Quarter's first album for a major label, Mick and Caroline for Arista Records. Understandably, much of the Latin Quarter case history deals with my part in the formation of Latin Quarter and I do not want to pre-empt that discussion, here; even so, it is still necessary to record

how disorienting was the experience of becoming involved in song-writing and then with record-making.

I cannot cast my experience as typical because I do not know the experiences of all those people who have made records but, from the moment my involvement in music-making progressed to signing a deal with a major label and making an album, I found the experience extremely demanding. The 'atmosphere' was continuously intense, particularly with regard to meeting schedules. The analogy of the major airport used in the previous chapter is central here: Latin Quarter had a touring schedule fixed to promote Mick and Caroline. We all knew that the album needed to be released to fit that schedule. At the same time, we knew that our producer had his own future commitments and could not work with us beyond a certain date and we also knew that Arista had albums by other acts waiting to be released and promoted once ours had been 'cleared'. At the same time, we all needed to complete the album in order to access the next recording and publishing advances in order to have an income. Inside this extremely tense framework, relations between the act and its manager, the manager and the record label and the record label and the act were all conflictual for reasons that pivoted on, not just the sound that the act was likely to emerge with from the studio, but also on estimations of the act's contemporary and future 'market profile'.

One of the songs I wrote for the album was called 'Negotiating with a loaded gun', where the theme of the song dealt with the experience of people who face overwhelming odds. It occurred to me, in researching Latin Quarter, how much this song expressed an unease I felt throughout the experience - but one that I stifled and was buried under the sheer frenetic pace of making and releasing records. What disturbed me most about the period at Arista was how alien the culture of the major

label was (we had been signed from a tiny independent label). I became aware very quickly that, however friendly they attempted to be (in a peculiar and particular kind of hyper-intense way), record company employees were like Janus, quite literally 'two-faced'. To us they had to show a face not just of caring and concern but also of respect (we were 'the artists', after all); but to their superiors they had to give cold appraisals of our current status and of their estimation of our future condition. In this, respect for the artist was supplanted by calculation of the likely yield of the commodity. I became aware also of how dependent we were on them, and on our manager, Marcus Russell. This 'dependency' was made obvious by the fact that we always seemed to be reacting to events rather than giving any progressive shape to them - and also that there was so much to react to. At the same time, I felt the extent to which my long-standing friendship with Russell was being undermined, not just by the tensions that flowed from our dramatic re-positioning (him the manager, me 'the managed') but from his evident immersion in, and seeming enjoyment of, this 'alien culture'.

In Getting High: The Adventures of Oasis (1997), Paolo Hewitt reports Russell's views on this period and on our relationship as friends. I will return to this in the conclusions, but it was this process of emotional upheaval in a long-standing friendship and my determination to analyse and understand it that led me to reflect, in advance of this research, so closely on what was happening to, and in, Latin Quarter. Again, what prompted this research was, in part, the fact that I did not find my experience reflected in the literature on pop, but I have found that experience, if not reflected, then clearly discernible, in studies of organisations. Organisational Theory is the title given to what was once, broadly, industrial sociology. In this way, its roots are almost as old as those of Sociology itself. Consequently, its development has

tended to reflect general tendencies in the development of that parent discipline - very loosely, broad Positivist and Anti-positivist disputes in the early century about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Durkheim and Weber); followed by a lengthy period of dominance by Functionalism (Parsons); followed by the creation of a comparative heterodoxy since the late-1960's (itself now challenged by post-modernism).

The reason I raise the subject of Organisational Theory here is that I need to make clear that I have not approached the construction of my case histories through the lens of any branch of this theory - I did not take theory into the field, I have found theory there. What I did take into the field was *experience*, and, through reflection, what I learned was that, in order to make sense of that experience, I had organised it in and through categories that are the 'stock-in-trade' of organisational theorists - a concern with how organisational employees understand and practice their jobs, a concern, therefore, with the relationship between 'structure' and 'action'; a recognition that pop acts are organisations in their own right and a further recognition that some form of alliance exists *between* organisations in record-making; a commitment to the notion that commodities are shaped through the negotiation of a shared understanding of the status of the commodity by all parties involved in commodification (a staple of interpretive, interactionist, and social action theory); and, finally, a belief that there is a differential access to 'resources' within the record-making experience and that the power to define the acceptability or otherwise of a finished commodity connects with access to, and deployment of, those resources.

Proximity to 'The Field'.

Issues that relate to, and derive from, organisational theory must be returned to in the concluding chapter, here I need to acknowledge that there must inevitably be differences in the quality and quantity of data generated through the case histories. In the Latin Quarter case, it is greater in both instances than it is in the cases of Respect and Roadhouse. I tackle the issues raised by this difference below, and in the two relevant chapters; but, from preceding remarks, it will be apparent that, in general, the differences relate to the fact that I had far greater access, even *post hoc*, to the individuals involved in making the Latin Quarter record than I did in any other case. This raises a general methodological point - could any researcher fulfil the goals of ethnographic research outlined by Cohen (goals with which I entirely agree) where signed acts are concerned? As Cohen herself acknowledges, the relationships she established with 'The Jactars' and 'Crikey its the Cromptons' were made possible, in part, by how 'flattered' they felt by her 'attention'. Signed acts are already in the position of being 'flattered' and access to them would be limited by a host of, probably insurmountable, factors - how would a researcher tour with an act? How likely would it be that a manager would allow such intimacy? Further, how would a researcher access decision making surrounding the act when the act, itself, is unlikely to enjoy such access? To an extent, Stokes surmounted some of these problems in Star-Making Machinery (1976)but it would be unhelpful to divert to an examination of his, insightful, text here; rather we need to recognise how this particular study differs from Cohen's work. Rock Culture in Liverpool affords a detailed 'glimpse' into the working practices (and the assumptions that informed them) of two aspirant acts, this one is a study of a complete process, from beginning to end. It differs, in this way, also from the work of Stokes, which made the study of

the making of an album an end in itself rather than a guide to any larger issues. But, whatever the validity of the recognition that we can only access explanations for failure after it has occurred, this recognition, alone, does not legitimise my researching my own experience.

If I had chosen to research in aspects of popular music away from a direct exploration of how pop is made - 'Frank Zappa and the Operatic Tradition', perhaps - then my experience of making pop records would not be so problematic (although it would still lead me to treat secondary resources with great care and to research decisions about recording in ways different from much sociological and almost all musicological practice). As it is, there is no single, fully-formed qualitative tradition that allows someone to research his or her own experience as an intrinsic part of a wider study. For example, Jacob (1987) identifies six 'traditions' in qualitative research: Human Ethology, Ecological Psychology, Holistic Ethnography, Cognitive Anthropology, the Ethnography of Communication, and Symbolic Interactionism. Not one of these, in its entirety, allows me to undertake what I wish to undertake - which is an evaluation of the combined processes of making a record that I have helped to write and record as a contribution to a wider debate on the fortunes of pop acts. Other writers offer different schema as their overview of the research methods that can be collected under the heading of 'Qualitative Research'. For example Burgess (1991) also indicates six non-quantitative traditions but he, confusingly, refers to 'Qualitative Research' as an optional-descriptive rather than a generic methodological term, one that he places alongside Ethnography, Fieldwork, Case Study, Field Research and Interpretive Procedures.

The practice of identifying 'traditions' is a common feature of the 'how to do qualitative research' texts, but whichever way I approached them I found that, not

only did they offer me no assistance in my 'search for a method', they collectively seemed to imply that I was automatically disbarred from conducting qualitative research. They did this, despite often large-scale differences between other aspects of the schema they presented (see below), by uniting to portray qualitative research as a methodological 'journey' from the academy to the field. In the earliest phases of this research, I internalised this and felt a tremendous compulsion to organise a similar 'journey' for myself and, in the process, lost what was unique about my own research perspective; for, rather than pretend otherwise, as I have noted, my journey has been from the field to the academy, and then back out. I will explore the more specific aspects of the restrictions met in methodology texts and my attempt to transform them below but, in general, we need to consider the special dilemma that the existing 'rules' of academic research represent for someone in my position. Put simply, other researchers are (and have been) free to interview me about my experiences of making pop music, I am part of 'the field', or of many 'fields'. How I answer their questions is guided by my own sense-making or meaning-making processes developed through my reflection on being a song-writer and record-maker. As soon as I ask myself a similar order of questions, then methodological 'alarm bells' begin to ring. If a researcher writes about Beck she or he is assessed on the basis of their intellectual rigour; if Beck writes about Beck it is 'autobiography' and must be used circumspectly. I still need to examine how my history of record-making bears on my position as researcher and on the methodological options this allows me; but I will assert, here, that I do not become a sociologist by suppressing the song-writer in me. The division of individual human understanding into sealed compartments is an impossibility, and the work of establishing my position as a researcher has come to be centrally informed by that belief.

I recognise that my going 'back out' is problematised by my having already been 'out there' and on an exercise that was not research but a real lived experience in making popular music. Initially, what this meant for my position as researcher was not so much that I felt I had 'all the answers' but that I had a very good idea what 'the answers' would be and where to look for them. Even before the making of Mick and Caroline, I had experienced enough conflict as a song-writer to have had forced on me the recognition that my music-making involved me in a complex web of relationships (to paraphrase Negus) over which I had little or no control (determining whether *anyone* has control will be a feature of this study). This was not how I had envisaged 'life in the music business' from my dedicated consumption of its myths. Instead, I had soaked up the popular cultural representation of that 'life' as one of almost unlimited glamour and excitement. While I did, indeed, experience glamour and excitement, I experienced an enormous amount more besides that was conflictual and draining. As a consequence of these intense and contrasting experiences, any earlier conception I might have held about how popular music is made was erased. On this basis, I have to acknowledge that I come to the business of researching the music industry with a perspective on that industry and its practices that cannot be undone or set aside. Even so, as I argue in chapter one,

> ..if I cannot set these perceptions aside then I need to make them explicit. I come to this research with prejudices (judgements already made), but even in this attempt to organise a research project into and through those prejudices, I *change* them. They are changed by being made to account for themselves; they will be changed by being asked to bear the weight of fresh evidence.

To indicate that I carry around in my head 'prejudices' about the music industry is not as much of a 'mea culpa' as it might appear to be. There is a curious 'atmosphere' that

permeates the standard 'how to' texts on qualitative research (cf Burgess 1991, Marshall and Rossman 1989, and many more). They all present the research process in roughly similar ways - as connected, cumulative phases that involve design, data collection, analysis and presentation of findings. This adherence to a 'system' is no guarantee, of itself, that qualitative methods contribute to the 'scientific' aspect of Sociology as a 'Social Science' and whether it does or not is not at issue here; what is at issue, though, is directly connected to this study, it concerns the notion of 'objectivity' and how this connects to the deployment of qualitative methods. As Kirk and Miller put it,

> That qualitative research has not built cumulatively on other qualitative research is due in large part to a lack of attention to issues of reliability. In order to make their findings relevant to other findings of whatever sort, qualitative researchers must accept the goal of objectivity, realize the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the ethnographic tradition, and co-ordinate ethnographic decision making to the four-phase structure of science. (Kirk and Miller, 1986,).

It would be completely misleading to suggest that this is the definitive position on the status of qualitative research as a social science. In another 'beginners guide', Pauly says the reverse,

> ..the best a qualitative researcher can do is to marshall a metaphor, to argue that reality has been managed, detained, coped with, slowed up, clarified, scaled down, illuminated, intensified, or resurrected. Qualitative researchers typically justify their performances by appeals to social and political principles other than "science" . (Pauly, 1991, p.23)

Although diametrically opposed in their representation of what qualitative methodology consists of and can 'do' both (and similar) accounts represent the distance of the 'academy' from the 'field' as a cleansing separation, as if researchers

are somehow not part of any world other than the academy and that, therefore, their 'objectivity' is somehow assured by their status; this is the 'curious atmosphere' referred to above. Rather than ally myself, here, with one 'camp' or the other (as represented by Kirk and Miller, at one extreme, and Pauly at the other), I intend to argue that the 'objectivity versus subjectivity' debate is a red herring - it represents a separation of the mind into a hierarchy of 'understandings', a separation that cannot be sustained. This does not mean that I believe, now, that 'anything goes', that all opinions are equally valid, and so on. Rather, the questions of research and research methods are still paramount; but what distinguishes the considered case from mere prejudice is not just 'evidence' but evidence of the gathering of evidence.

Interpretive Procedures and Auto/Biography.

The February 1993 issue of Sociology was a 'special' issue on 'Biography and Autobiography in Sociology'. In the journal's editorial, an attempt was made to draw a 'balance sheet' of sociology's use for, and understanding of, the role of biography and autobiography in the discipline. It acknowledged that a handful of theorists had broached the issues that surround such work (notably Bertaux 1981, Plummer 1983 and Denzin 1989, 1990, see below) but, implicitly, represented their individual contributions as comparatively isolated, although useful. The editorial drew attention to the discipline's comparative lack of engagement with the production and consumption of Auto/biographical texts and to the flaws in the treatment of the latter that had already developed as a result of the absence of a systematic engagement with them (for example, there is a an evident tension between those theorists who treat the work of auto/biographers as sources of 'evidence' of the material reality of the lives described; and those who would 'deconstruct' such works

as narrative accounts of lives rather than as directly referential documents, as such). The argument made for sociology's need to begin to engage with auto/biography pivots on the question of the production of knowledge. Substantially, sociological methods and concepts turn on the 'production and analysis' of "lives" and "life events" (through ethnography, interviews, oral history, and so on) while much of sociological theory concentrates on the 'biographical practices' that surround such key sites as the self and its place in the social world. But, while other disciplines have become caught up in the 're-seeing and re-thinking in intellectual life' *(the upheavals around 'post-*modernism') sociology has been slower to respond to the new ways of conceptualising its own practice that this 're-thinking' demands. The 'other disciplines' so referred to are, broadly, literary studies, cultural studies and women's studies and, while it is the influence of post structuralism in these areas that, in part, helped to 'open up' the discussion, it is to the impact of Feminist ideas about the place of personal experience as 'field research' (my term) that most of the contributions to the special issue are directed.

In order to establish a context in which to discuss the potential contribution of feminist sociology to methodology in the area of auto/biographical resources and practices we need first to consider the various routes that a concern with 'personal' accounts of social practices have taken in sociology. Plummer in 'Documents of Life' (1983) offers a thorough and committed account of the value of researching 'life documents' (diaries, letters, oral history, photographs etc.) first established in the sociology that developed at Chicago University in the earliest years of this century. His argument is that Chicago offered a particularly rich combination of philosophical and research interests that combined to create a commitment not just to sociology but to a 'humanistic' sociology; one that legitimated a concentration on

accounts of lived experience - either by researchers of social actors or by actors themselves - as the basis for a sociology that rejected 'abstractions' and 'absolutes'. In place of meta-theories, the early Chicago sociologists favoured a 'case study' approach that helped make explicit why and how social individuals interacted in the ways that they did. While, ultimately, this concern would crystallise into Symbolic Interactionism, the importance of 'Life Documents' in sociological research faded abruptly with the rise of Positivism (in its primary expression as 'Functionalism') and remained obscured by Functionalism's even after the revival in Marxist Sociology began to loosen Functionalism's hold over the discipline. So great was the eclipse that, as Plummer records, 'the method is downright peripheral to the concerns of most methodologists'; a peripherality he exemplifies by finding no reference to researching 'human documents' in any edition of the annual review publication 'Sociological Methodology' since its inception. Similarly, there are only 'seven fleeting references' in Burgess's 884 page 'Teaching Research Methodology to postgraduates'.

Plummer's book makes a strong case for a reversal of the above position and argues the need for a revival in the study of 'life documents' with great passion. Nonetheless, his is a work very much 'of its time'. Published in 1983, all the references are to works published in the 70's and while Foucault, for example, is mentioned, there is no Derrida, and therefore no sense of the 'turn to textuality', that represented the 'motor' of post-modernism. Denzin, in 'Interpretive Biography', published in 1989 benefits considerably from the later date of publication. He presents an altogether more optimistic picture of a resurgence not simply in interest in 'life documents' but an increasing legitimacy and sophistication in their use and, to this extent, his contribution to the field belies the limited acknowledgement he receives in 'Sociology'. Denzin, in fact, begins his study with reference to Plummer's

work but then goes rapidly on to show the extent to which, in his terms, 'the method has returned to the human disciplines' (Denzin, 1989, p.8); although, as he argues, 'some would say that it never left and that it is enjoying a "rebirth" in the late-1980's' (ibid) . He then describes the extent of that 'rebirth' by indicating the extent of new contributions to the field that gained pace throughout the 1980's - both in the form of published studies and the setting up of journals and study groups.

In his turn, Denzin also provides a brief historical overview of the genesis of interest in autobiographical material, in much the way that Plummer does, but here he makes the mode of its survival during the years of 'eclipse' more accessible; citing, as he does, the work of C. Wright Mills and Sartre as having kept alive and developed the study of the individual, social actor. He then identifies Derrida as the main well-spring for the contemporary resurgence in interest in lived experience for the new approaches which the latter's theories of language offered for the study of autobiographical texts; but he then eschews the path into the elaborations of post-modernist exposition taken by so many post-structualists. Instead, in this work and in the later 'Interpretive Interactionism'(1990), (his attempt to constitute 'the existential interpretive approach' as a fully-fledged methodology) Denzin is more concerned to sensitise the researcher to the social dimensions of the personal dramas faced by the individual. In this, he is guided by a variety of different research traditions (particularly Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology) but he also draws marked attention to 'the feminist critique of positivism'. What is especially notable for this discussion in Denzin's attention to developments in Feminist theory, is the coincidence of his identification (and application) of key feminist methodological practices with much of the argument in favour of a feminist sociology proposed in the editorial to the special issue of 'Sociology', referred to above, and to the

development of an argument for this perspective in the work of Liz Stanley, that issue's editor and principal contributor. Both Denzin's work and Stanley's work contain well-argued cases for the legitimacy of auto/biographical material as research data, and I will be guided by their arguments; but this does not mean either that their arguments are identical, or that they necessarily directly support the procedures that I propose to undertake. Even so, the work of both theorists can be shown to have a particular relevance for the aims and methods of this study. It is to an examination of both their work and these aims and methods that I now turn.

Stanley on Auto/Biography.

Instructively, Stanley begins her article, 'On Auto/biography in Sociology' with a condemnation of exactly the practice I have engaged in in the previous section - the attempt to establish a contextual heritage of precursors for new developments in theory. As she argues,

> ..such an apparent "history" is actually composed by histories, by competing historiographies (written versions of the past, not slices of the past itself) which systematically excise or silence or dismiss their alternatives. (Stanley, 1993, p.41)

In place of this, her aim is to offer, 'two alternative histories, which focus .. on methodological procedures and ontological problematics'. Stanley then proceeds to provide not a replacement for the Plummer/Denzin version of the restoration of sociological work in and on auto/biography but, as she puts it, 'parallel accounts .. additions to a complex historiography'. At once, then, Stanley begins to apply the sociological and methodological practice she elaborates in her work 'The Auto/Biographical "I" '; namely, the practice of 'Intellectual Autobiography'.

Stanley's conception of 'Intellectual Autobiography' is sketched out in her article 'On Auto/biography in Sociology' and is then elaborated on, and exemplified in, 'The Auto/biographical "I"'. Its main points are:

(1). That there are precursors for her position: separately, Robert Merton's 'Sociological Autobiography' and Feminist 'Reflexivity' (first practised as 'consciousness raising').

(2). Merton's work is vital in that his emphasis on autobiography as a text allows such work to be seen, in Stanley's words, 'as a *topic* for investigation in its own right, and not as a *resource* to tell us about something lying outside the text itself', with the consequence that our attention is directed,

> to the processes by which such texts are constructed as well as interpreted - to the processes of *writing* autobiographical texts, and also to the processes of *reading* them. (all emphases are Stanley's) (Stanley, 1993, p.43)

(3). Merton argues that 'sociological autobiography' consists of utilising,

> sociological perspectives .. and analytical procedures to construct and interpret a narrative text that purports to tell one's own history within the larger history of one's times..(it) is .. the constructed personal text of the interplay between the active agent and the social structure.. full-fledged sociological autobiographers relate their intellectual development both to changing social and cognitive micro-environments and to the encompassing macro-environments provided by the larger society and culture. (Merton, 1988, pp. 19-20 in Stanley, 1993, p.43)

(4). Stanley considers this a 'revolutionising' of 'sociological attention to autobiography' because it makes possible a method through which the writer can, simultaneously, reflect *in* writing and *on* the writing process itself ('the epistemological conditions of its own production'). She then argues that a very similar process of 'reflexivity' was developed, independently, in and through

'consciousness raising' in the women's movement; through which practice 'conventional dichotomies and binaries (were) refused' (the 'personal' and the 'political', for example). This, in turn, encouraged,

> ..a reflexive understanding of the relationship between individual practice and social structure, not only relating selves to social collectivities, but also recognising the part that selves play in constructing structures as well as being mediated by them. "Reflexivity" here is located in treating one's self as subject for intellectual inquiry, and it encapsulates the socialised, non-unitary and changing self posited in feminist social thought. (Stanley, 1993, p.44)

(5). Stanley traces the feminist ideas that developed from women's movement 'reflexivity' to their application in theory. As Denzin does elsewhere, she identifies the work of Cook and Fonow as the site of the first major theorising of 'reflexivity' which, they argue (and she endorses) is central to feminist methodology; alongside, notably,

> ..rejection of the claimed objective/subjective dichotomy (and) a concern with researching and theorising experience. (Stanley, 1993, p.44)

(6). 'Intellectual Autobiography' is, then, the sociological, textual practice of 'reflexivity' (she calls it an 'accountable reflexivity' in her book). This consists of focusing on 'the processes by which evaluation, interpretations and conclusions have been reached'; or, as she puts it in 'The Autobiographical "I"',

> ..focusing on factors involved in the genesis and development of the writer's understanding and interpretation of the biographical subject or subjects. (Stanley, 1992, p.136)

What needs to be appreciated about Stanley's position is her instrumental approach to post-modernism. For example, she takes, especially from Derrida and post-structuralism, the notion that,

> social life is by definition theorised by those who live it.. for much of the time what social life consists of is the construction, presentation and negotiation of accounts or versions - everyday verbal "texts", rather than behavioural events themselves. Social life is, then, theorised through and through and is concerned with textual representation. (Stanley, 1992, p.93)

This allows her to erase generic differences between 'autobiography' and 'biography' and also the binary opposition of *'subjectivity/objectivity':*

> Life is "subjective" because we necessarily see and understand *through our own* consciousness. This is certainly a social and not an individual consciousness; but it can never be an objective one, for by definition it derives from particular "subjectivities".. An interest in the textual representation of particular lives emphasises the highly problematic nature of realist views of auto/biography, emphasising the necessarily selective nature of memory, of evidence, of what is included and excluded, and also the equally necessary role of the conventions of narrative form and the concomitant infusion of auto/biographical products with fictive devices of various kinds. A concern with autobiography shows that "self" is a fabrication, not necessarily a lie but a highly complex truth. (Stanley, 1992, p.164)

On this basis, to live life is to generate texts; to write is to generate texts through selective practices and narrative devices. Her rejection of much of post modernist theorising is that it refuses to reflect on 'the conditions of its own production', failing to recognise that the 'post modern' author does not 'die' in the way that post modernism, itself, asserts that he or she should do. Who or what is 'dead' for Stanley is the *subject;* the idea that a single, knowable figure can be revealed, or re-constructed, through a work of literary 'archaeology'. Rather, from feminism (or from her reading of it, feminism was never a monolith) she takes the idea that 'facts and arguments are *'contingent'* (her emphasis). In the same way that women continue to

need to fight their definition by patriarchy as subordinate to men through a praxis that emphasises understanding the extent to which gendered identity is a social construct and working to change that identity through changing the social conditions of its reproduction; so our understanding of lives, in general, and the accounts made of the lives of others, demands to be guided by the question, 'who says?'. Whoever writes about themselves, or about others, is a 'socially located' individual and their view will be a partial one. This cannot be avoided and it demands to be acknowledged; but not acknowledged and then 'set aside'. Rather, the author must make this 'acknowledgement' a continuous feature of their writing; they are 'accountable' for their choices and the narrative devices they employ, therefore they must reflect on these, make them 'open' to the reader. No author can 'fix' the meaning of the text, but equally, no author should 'pretend' to this. Obviously, an 'open', 'reflexive' text will still be the product of narrative devices, but if it is one that reflects on the conditions of its production *as* a condition of its production then it encourages 'active readership' and specifies the author as but one 'albeit privileged, voice among other voices'.

The Researcher and the Field.

Stanley's view of her role as biographer and as autobiographer is as an,

> inquiring analytical sociological - here feminist sociological - agent who is concerned in constructing rather than discovering social reality and sociological knowledge. (Stanley, 1993, p.49)

This view is close to Denzin's 'Interpretive Interactionist'. In both cases, the emphasis is placed, simultaneously, on not just trying to understand the world from the point of view of the researched (a staple idea of much qualitative research) but on reflecting

on how the researcher comes to that understanding, and what this means for how they write their research findings. As Denzin puts it,

> Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher. The events and troubles that are written about are ones the writer has already experienced or witnessed firsthand. As David Sundow argues, the individuals perspective is definitionally critical for establishing the "what" and I add the "how" of problematic social experience. (Denzin, 1990, p.12)

In the same way that Stanley argues from a theorisation of comparatively disparate but 'coalesced' theoretical positions, so Denzin draws on much the same material. Again, the emphasis is placed on the 'socialised individual', whose biography is the product of interactional textual production in social encounters. Similarly, Denzin is determined that the researcher acts as interpreter of the field *for* the field as much as for the academy. His attempts to ensure that a researcher achieves this degree of clarity and shared understanding are codified in strict methodological guidelines for the conduct of 'Interpretive Interactionism'. Embedded in his methodological view (and his nearest coincidence with Stanley) is his recognition that not only can researchers not avoid issues of history, power, emotion and knowledge in their work; their job is to make explicit their own place in an open discussion of the play of these forces not just in the interactions they observe, and interpret, but in their own responses to these interactions.

Whether as 'Interpretive Interactionism' or 'Existential Ethnography', Denzin's description of his method echoes, and is echoed in, Stanley's 'Accountable Reflexivity' and 'Intellectual Biography'. Rather like the Beaubourg (Georges Pompidou) Centre in Paris, these methodologies wear their fundamental processes on their surfaces and this, I feel, is the way that I should proceed in my own research. Although able to draw on an interpretive heritage almost as long as Sociology's own,

the specific practice of treating the researcher's own experience as data in its own right is a very new one (for example, the 'Special Issue' of 'Sociology' appeared six months after I began this research). On this basis, while I am guided by the sense I have made of the work of, particularly Stanley and Denzin, what needs to be established at the outset is that this type of research is still in its infancy. Strictly speaking, I cannot use either Stanley's or Denzin's methods, at least not in their entirety: Stanley's for obvious reasons, I am a man; I cannot be a feminist; Denzin's because he restricts 'Interpretive Interactionism' to the explication of 'epiphanies' - 'life experiences that radically alter the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects' and, by these, he means the experience of deep, personal troubles.

Despite these necessary reservations, if we take the last quote from Stanley, above, I feel that I am exactly 'an inquiring .. agent .. who is concerned in constructing rather than discovering social reality and sociological knowledge'. The research process itself has impelled me in the direction of 'Intellectual Autobiography' ('finding a way to ask a question') and while I have no intention of writing a full autobiography, clearly I will need to write the biography of an episode, not just in my life but in the lives of many others. By furnishing my own account of the making of Mick and Caroline I deploy 'analytical procedures to construct and interpret a narrative' (Merton). By interviewing the key participants involved in making Mick and Caroline I encourage them not simply to reflect on their understanding of their own experience of making that record, but to give their reflections verbal shape ('textualise' them). Through my questioning of them, participants 'create' an account of the experience *for my consumption.* By selecting from their accounts and textualising my interpretation of them through a selective, narrative process, I make a new account; but this account, through the application of

sociological perspectives and procedures, is one that I could not possibly have written without bringing the latter to bear, through the conduct of a research project, on the process of making a record. Further, by acting on my recognition that researching involves my own reflection not just on what I *did* but on what I am *doing*, the account I write is not merely a rehearsal of my 'prejudices'. What sense the reader makes of my account is, then, the reader's own. My contribution to that reading is not just that I have furnished the text but that I have attempted to make clear how the text was constructed, so improving the chances of an 'active' reading of the text by refusing devices that pretend to the discovery of a 'complete' account of making not just Mick and Caroline but any of the records so discussed.

In the same way that I feel my approach is sympathetic to Stanley's, despite some obvious caveats, I do not feel that I do violence to Denzin's conception of the 'epiphany' by representing my experience of the music industry as a series of transformative crises, of which the making of Mick and Caroline, itself, continued through large numbers of quite fundamental conflicts. The same may be equally true of the record-making experiences of others in this study. Certainly, as I indicated at an earlier stage, the experience of making records (not just Mick and Caroline) 'erased' earlier conceptions of how I imagined the music industry operated, with the result that I am now 'sensitised' to discussions about records and recording in ways that I could not possibly have been had I not undergone the experiences I have. These, quite clearly, are the terms he uses to identify appropriate cases for the application of his methodology. In situating my position as researcher, in this way, it is still the case that, although I will apply methods suggested by the work of Stanley, Denzin, and others who have contributed to the development of Sociological or Intellectual Auto/biography, I do not in any sense feel compelled to remain faithful to

any one conception of this practice - I am not a 'Denzinist' or a 'Stanleyist'. Rather, as a researcher into Popular Music-making, it became apparent to me that new methodological practices are demanded if record makers are to study (not just their own) record-making. Because of this, I have come to recognise that I cannot research musical-industrial practices without researching my own researching into those practices. 'Sociological' or 'Intellectual Autobiography' offers a method through which I can combine 'asking' and 'answering' questions. As a 'new' method, I develop it through application, rather than apply a finished method against whose precepts my efforts might be assessed. Whether Intellectual Autobiography is so novel, or so radically different from existing qualitative methods that it needs to be described as some 'other' methodology entirely (as in 'post methodology'), is a debate that lies beyond these remarks. I doubt that it does, at least in this case, because I need, now, to proceed by routes that are well-established in qualitative methodology.

Conclusions.

This study has needed to take a considerable 'loop' in order to return to the issue of considering the ways that pop acts experience making records for major companies and any connections between this and the failure of those acts to make records that became 'hits'. Again, to determine to study music as 'social practice and process' (Cohen) and record-making as the result of 'complex formal organisations' (Frith) means being able to specify organisational 'practices' (Negus) and to identify the groups and individuals involved in the interactions initiated in, and through, those practices. In this way, some sense of how the product *became* the product should begin to be developed. No-one can re-create, in its entirety, the sequence of interactions, and the motivations for the contributions of individuals within those

interactions, that led to the eventual outcome. Further, no-one involved in the process of making a record has access to all decisions made in making that record. The best we can hope for is to gain a new perspective on the record-making experience, not just from the accounts of participants, but from how those accounts are put together. Because I make an account of my own part in making a record I 'breach' some of the standard procedures of qualitative methodology, however these are defined (this 'breach' and its possible consequences are the potential 'impediments' to the study referred to previously). For this reason I have considered it necessary to adopt a method that is reflexive in the hope that this reflexivity contributes to, rather than obscures, our understanding of the sense-making experience and, thereby, the practices of record makers.

I now propose to turn to the exploration of three 'case histories' of record-making for major labels. My use of the term 'case history' is guided partly by the recognition that I did not conduct a series of case studies - recording and analysing actions as they occurred - but also by Denzin's application of the term, one that attempts to reconstruct an 'epiphany' through the participant's own account of that epiphanous incident. I have already argued why 'epiphany' is applicable to the experience of making records that fail (it is probably also true of making records that are hugely successful). Negus recognises how devastating failure can be for the acts concerned. Certainly this was my experience and, similarly, both the individuals I study here, and also the many other members of pop acts I have encountered over the years, testified to the disruptive short and long-term effects of needing to adjust to the failure of an act (and the collapse of a musical role and identity) that had probably absorbed their entire attention for all the time between late childhood and the day they lost their deal. This is not to say that all members of all pop acts give up music

as soon as they lose their major deal - musicians don't forget how to write or play over night. Rather, popular music makers aim to make music that is popular. As this can only be achieved through sales of records, the alternatives facing acts after they are 'dropped' are either to try to win a new deal, re-adjust to a much lower level experience (playing in pub bands or on the, comparatively, lucrative, 'club' circuit), remain in pop in an intermediary role, or to give up altogether. The 'aftermath' years of once-signed pop acts would make a study in its own right. Here I concentrate on the process that led to the dashing of hopes through a study of three acts, introduced in the first section of the next chapter, that all experienced life on a major label with disastrous (but hardly uncommon) results.

Chapter Six.

Case Histories:

Respect and Roadhouse.

Introduction.

Accounts now follow of the record-making experiences of three acts: Latin Quarter, Respect and Roadhouse. I begin with Respect and Roadhouse. Both were Sheffield-based acts who signed major deals with Chrysalis and Phonogram, respectively. I came to include these acts in this study as a result of a realisation that my experience of making an unsuccessful album was quite a common occurrence. After beginning this research I moved to Sheffield. I began to teach song-writing and quickly met people in the local music community. Sheffield, although a large city,

does not have the same history of providing 'hit' acts as that enjoyed by Manchester and Liverpool. Even so, its history includes Dave Berry and the Cruisers, Joe Cocker and the Grease Band, Def Leppard, The Human League, ABC, Cabaret Voltaire and, more recently, Pulp, Moloko, Baby Bird and Olive. As I got to know people in the music community I came to know, and know of, numerous individuals who had been members of signed acts that had never 'made it'. Failure is extremely isolating, and, while it was not exactly comforting to know that other people had 'been there', it helped give this research a clearer focus because it immediately suggested the possibility that, whatever the differences between each individual experience, the possibility arose that there might also exist important (and consistent) commonalities between all our experiences. Even so, before exploring what 'consistencies' may or may not exist, it is necessary to connect the more general issues of methodology explored in the previous chapter with the specific nature of the generation of data in these cases.

Put simply, I could not explore the experiences of Respect and Roadhouse in anything like the detail I could bring to the Latin Quarter account. As a founder member of Latin Quarter, some of the most intimate details of its history are known to me, but, where the other two are concerned, I was able to build an impression of the fates of these acts only in ways at once similar to, and distinct from, those of an ethnographer. If we return to Cohen's account of the demands of ethnography then I clearly met most of the criteria for ethnographic research she identifies: I developed 'relationships in the field'; I 'spoke the language' of other musicians and I had considerable 'face-to-face' contact with them. Where my 'case histories' break with Cohen's schema in their genesis is that none of the musicians with whom I interacted ever considered me as an 'outside researcher'. I was either a friend, acquaintance or

colleague - at least until I asked them whether they would take part in interviews with me. This is not to argue that all my contact with all the musicians I have interacted with has been in the form of covert research, but, equally, I have been able to interrogate those encounters in ways most of my contacts would be surprised by.

As I observed in the previous chapter, when I began to read PMS literature, I could not find my experience reflected in it. There was no account of the specificities of failure, only partial accounts of the music industry or books like Garfield's Expensive Habits that dealt with chicanery rather than simply with the experience of pop music-making as an uncertain process. Once outside the intense confines of a pop act and back in 'the real world' I began to find my experience reflected in that of other musicians. Perhaps this should not have been as surprising as I find it but, again, pop acts lead very intense existences in which time is no longer marked by days and weeks, by the regularity of T.V. Soaps, or by the progress of a football season through Saturdays and Wednesdays from late-Summer to late-Spring. Instead, recording pop acts live by an entirely unique calendar that is marked by four repeating time periods - recording, rehearsal, promotion, tour; recording, rehearsal, promotion, tour. The demands of this schedule obliterate conventional time markers and the convenient cultural periodisations we make as consumers of pop (The 'Merseyboom', 'Madchester') disappear from view inside the record industry. Once this breaks down, as it so frequently does, then, again, failure is isolating and simply to re-adjust to the patterns of daily time-keeping demands considerable attention, as do matters of keeping body and soul together. As I began to focus on this research I needed, partially, to reconstitute my relationships, both within Latin Quarter and its wider field and beyond this to the fields of my other respondents, but I could never 'cleanse' them of their former incarnation. I could never achieve the distance that

academic researchers take for granted because I did not begin from the academy. This then led me to re-consider not only my position as researcher but also the prescriptions of ethnography - ethnographers may not live in the world as gang members or alcoholics but they still form views and reach conclusions about myriad social relationships before ever they enter 'the field'. Cohen makes this point when she observes,

> strangeness, familiarity, otherness are shifting categories. A situation or friend can be both strange and familiar concurrently or at different times and in different contexts, and one can alter perspective, engaging with and distancing oneself from relationships and activities around one. Cohen, 1993, p.125)

I believe I have achieved or attained the type of distance that Cohen describes by making exactly the recognition she draws our attention to, but it remains the case that the data generated through researching Respect and Roadhouse is of a different order, scale and type from that generated by researching Latin Quarter. If what follows appears unbalanced in both quality and quantity then these differences can be made to work for, rather than detract from, this research. They can be made to do this if we keep in mind the 'I' who caused this data to be generated.

At base, I construct case histories of record-making experiences through unstructured interviews with key participants in the record-making process. As all of the previous remarks have attempted to show, I do not conduct this research as a model of qualitative research because of the singularities of my position as researcher; but the question of 'position' goes further than this. So far, in making these observations, I have drawn on a version of the 'I' that came to research but, as I have argued, this was not the 'I' that was encountered by my informants. I gained access to those informants either by already knowing them (in the case of making the Latin Quarter record Mick and Caroline) or by being introduced to them as a member

of Latin Quarter. That I came to the field as a friend, former colleague, or fellow musician will have its consequences for how I conducted my interviews and for the data produced through them (how I interpret that data will also be affected by my experience of making records). Because I did not enter the field as a researcher, but re-cast myself as a researcher at a later date, I produced data differently from a researcher; further, because I entered different fields with a different status in each, I, again, produced data differently *in each case:*

1. In the case of Latin Quarter, whether with former band members or with management and record company personnel, I am likely to produce different data from other researchers both because of my intimacy with the informants but also because I am researching a *shared* experience. This does not mean that I am likely to get closer to 'the truth'; rather, it means that, between us, in the act of discussion or conversation, the informant and I will create a new 'account' of what went on; we will negotiate our individual understandings to create a new version of the making of the record that has a beginning, a middle and an end - but these will define an entirely new narrative, one that the informant will feel more or less comfortable with (they would not want to upset me through a confrontation). But, while they will tailor their remarks to suit me; they will be unlikely to denigrate their own contribution in the process under discussion. Further, and as a consequence of this, whatever version they give me will not be the version in their heads; it will be a version made up with and through me (in response to my responses; in response to their own anticipation of my motives and responses): the version in their heads, even if I could access it, would not be 'the truth' because no-one person owns the title to that.

2. Where Respect and Roadhouse (and other musicians I have interviewed) are concerned, the data generated, the stories told, will be different from those

provoked by a more orthodox researcher, but they will not be of the same order as the data generated in the Latin Quarter case. In the instance of the former, my position of researcher is affected by the 'credentials' that I bring to the relationship and to the interview(s). These 'credentials' (writer of a top 20 hit record, membership of pop act that signed major deals) immediately puts me on a different footing - I am a 'member of the club' and, as such, a different discourse will be engaged that will produce, again, versions of events different from those provoked by more orthodox researchers. Even so, these 'versions' will not be closer to the 'reality' of making the record in question; in some ways a respondent may feel less willing to defend the experience, to be less considered and more vituperative, because of my 'sharing' a similar experience. In all instances, an intimacy, on my part, with record industry practices and the social processes of music-making will be assumed which could be more or less productive than if the interview was with another type of stranger; certainly, they will be differently productive. To acknowledge these aspects of my position does not deny that I am far closer to the position of the orthodox researcher once I step out of the Latin Quarter circle - the dimension of a *directly* shared experience is entirely missing and, more importantly, I have no way of re-assembling 'the cast' in these particular dramas. Effectively, I am encouraging, and participating in, the construction of the stories of single individuals who made records and I will take from these 'personal recollections of events, their causes and effects' aspects of their stories that connect (because they agree, disagree or contribute something different) to my account of making Mick and Caroline. I will then compare and contrast the stories so generated with specific reference to the processes that led to the failure of the planned recording and to the interactions within the act and between the act and intermediary figures that constituted that process.

1. Respect and The Kissing Game.

Respect was formed by Josie Robson and Malcolm Walmsley in Sheffield in early 1985. Within a short time, Richard Hartley rejoined them to re-establish a triumvirate that had formed the core of two previous bands dating back to the early 1980's. Initially, Walmsley and Hartley had approached Robson at the then well-known Sheffield venue 'The Limit' to sing backing vocals for Sons and Lovers which Robson described as 'less than a band and more of a project'. At this time, she was lead vocalist for Tsi Tsa, her fourth local band in four years. Walmsley and Hartley had also been members of at least one previous band so, by the time of the formation of Respect, all three members had had a lengthy experience of making music at a local level. In the case of Sons and Lovers, emphasis was placed more on recording than on performance, Walmsley did all the writing in what Robson described as 'a very stylised package' formed around the example of the close harmony styles of the 1940's. Walmsley and Hartley made several trips to London in an attempt to attract publishing rather than record company interest, but made little headway. Eventually their interest waned and the emphasis of Walmsley's work reverted to performance.

'Performance' for the core of Respect came in the form of Skin, a nine-piece soul and R&B band that played material written entirely by Walmsley. With Josie Robson as lead vocalist, Walmsley on keyboards and Hartley on drums, Skin played the local circuit for two years but attracted no record company interest. Such was the volume of the band, and so long had she spent away from live work, that Josie Robson developed nodes on her vocal cords. The strict regime of treatment she was

forced to follow in order to repair the damage to her vocal cords led to the rapid demise of Skin but opened the way for the rise of Respect. By this time she and Walmsley were partners and their joint absence from performance encouraged a closer (though still far from equal) writing relationship that, in turn, encouraged the development of a fresh musical identity. As Robson put it,

> Malcolm wrote 'The Girl Needs Respect'... What we did that was really exciting was pitch everything about five notes lower than it had been and my voice was born ... There were women singing who were getting away with being ... much bluesier so I think that gave us confidence to pitch my voice somewhere else ... it was wonderful here was this blues stuff that ... linked ... to some of the more soulful girl groups that I loved, to Malcolm's 40's writing, and yet it was with electronics, it was kind of our Eurythmics days were born.[1]

Within a short time, Richard Hartley had been played the new material and, while there was no instrument for him to play, Respect felt 'incomplete without him'. Although he would enjoy less creative input than in Sons and Lovers, Hartley's role was described by Josie Robson in these terms, terms that will have a bearing on later remarks:

> I always felt he had impeccable taste. He generally tended to know which of the songs would get a good response from record companies. I thought he was an important mediating link from us to the outside world in a sense. Being very much enclosed within ourselves we could never tell a good song from a bad song (Robson, ibid)

And further,

> With Richard coming back into ... the unit ... all those dreams started again and we were very much clearer and it was easier to organise three people than nine people. We had a four-track so we could now record at home instead of having to shell out thousands and thousands of pounds ... It was ... back to the project. (Robson, ibid)

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[1] All quotes from interviews with Josie Robson between July, 1994 and June, 1995.

The original intention was to 'get a whole load of songs together and take control again' but part of 'taking control' in pursuit of 'all those dreams' was to *cede* control to a manager (in none of any of their previous bands had the Respect members been managed). Josie Robson is particularly disparaging about Chris Cox, the man who would manage Respect for the next few months (from mid- to late-1987), but she allows that Cox acted as a catalyst for them in the sense that he introduced them to the idea that they needed a producer to progress from what were effectively 'bedroom demos'. Cox (a partner in a local studio) contacted Ian Levene, a young producer who specialised in the then emerging field of 'dance re-mixes' and set up a Respect session at Levene's home studio. As Robson explained,

> We could see that not only did we need a manager but we needed a producer because we could write them but we could do very little with them after that ... we'd done 'The Chain' (a piece of electro-music, under Chris Cox's influence) as well as we possibly could then Chris said, "but there's so much further you could go with this" and Malcolm said, "You're right". It was the first time I'd heard him say "yes, I might need some help on it" so it was quite astonishing. (Robson, ibid)

In the event, the Ian Levene sessions fell through (storms had wrecked his studio), but because the recognition had been made that a producer was required Malcolm Walmsley then contacted the emerging producer Chris Heaton. Walmsley's connection with Heaton was entirely coincidental, both had attended the same wedding in London some months earlier. On hearing the material, Heaton was immediately impressed and arranged through his partner, the studio manager at the leading London studio Swanyard, to record two songs at the studio's expense (as a speculative venture: all parties would be reimbursed, and more, in the event of the tracks securing a record deal). This began a three and a half year association that

proved entirely pivotal for Respect and would end only with the failure of the Respect album.

In the first instance, Chris Heaton introduced Respect to a manager, Jack Stephens. During the Swanyard sessions Chris Cox let down the band very badly on the payment of backing singers and they parted company with him that weekend. Stephens had been an A&R man for RCA and, as a result, knew the record industry extremely well. At the time he managed Scarlet Fantastic who had had one hit single on Arista Records ('No Memory'). Heaton's enthusiasm for him, recommended Stephens to the band. His assessment of them was (as Josie Robson recollected) 'I think these two songs are top ten (but) I don't think you're there yet'. What not being 'there yet' meant was that the band did not have the style, presence and attitude to go with the music they were creating; or, at least, this is how they interpreted his remarks. What this meant was that Respect spent the next fifteen months working not just on new material but on their presentation, individually and collectively. Throughout this period they maintained close contact with Stephens who did nothing directly to advance their careers until he decided that they were 'ready', at the beginning of 1989, whereupon he announced that he had been 'priming' Peter Robinson about Respect for some months and that he was now going to play him some Respect demos. Robinson, by the time Stephen's played him the material, was head of A&R at Chrysalis records. He had formerly been at RCA (where one of his last acts was to sign Latin Quarter) and Stephens' route to him was clearly his connection as a former colleague. Robinson liked the demos and also liked Respect when he met them, to the extent that he immediately offered to sign them (in April, 1989). The deal took until September to complete, partly because as several tracks had already been produced and recorded, the record company had to negotiate not

only with a new act but with a producer and a studio who owned master tapes of what would form a large part of *their* album

At last, by September 1989, Respect was signed to a major label, two years after their first work at Swanyard and seven years after coming together through Sons and Lovers. With so much recording already completed, Respect was able to deliver its album quite quickly, by February 1990. Despite this, and despite having had some tracks ready for a considerable period, there were substantial delays in releasing the first Respect single. It was not until July that year that 'Love Drives On' was released and this received scant promotion - 'they took it out after a fortnight, they said it wasn't selling'. In the interim there was, as Josie Robson puts it,

> A lot of wrangles... we spent £3,000 on a photo session where we got two photos because we wouldn't use any of the rest of them because they were compromising us ... we fought with the record company ... Jack was excellent because he had the nerve to fight with them ... He was so aggressive all the time, "I'm not having this for my band", and so on .... We were unhappy about a lot of things, we were quite a Bolshie band - about the singles, the sleeves. I was very concerned that I didn't want to be marketed as a woman ... we were a group, a band, we each had our role to play ... and Jack absolutely supported us in all of that. He was important but I wonder whether we were right. (Robson, ibid)

Despite their manager's reassurances that first singles were very often simply speculative affairs to fine-tune the marketing campaign, Respect were aware that little campaign was in evidence, the press department said that it was impossible to gain press coverage for them and radio plays for 'Love Drives On' had been few. Jack Stephens' response to the growing crisis of confidence within Respect was to urge them to form a live band while they waited for the release of the follow-up single 'What comes After Good-Bye?' This, Stephens thought, was the band's 'trump card'; a duet between Josie Robson and Phil Oakey of the Human League, the track had been added to the album at the last minute after, again, a chance meeting between

Malcolm Walmsley and Phil Oakey at a Sheffield studio. The inclusion of what seemed a sure-fire hit single on the album was clearly greatly to Respect's credit but the promotion campaign for the single quickly collapsed when Phil Oakey made those involved aware that he would only appear on two TV shows, 'Top of the Pops' and 'Wogan' (then the top British TV 'chat show'). As it was, an appearance on 'Wogan' was secured and set for early January. Two hours before they were due to board the train to London on the day of the show, Respect received a telephone call from Chrysalis who told them that their 'Wogan' slot had been given to Milli Vanilli, perhaps in a vain attempt to maintain the latter's 'profile' in the face of the revelations that the two individuals who comprised the act had made little, if any, contribution to their own records. Despite further reassurances that they would soon appear on a subsequent programme, this appearance was not forthcoming and 'What Comes After Good-Bye?' also failed to make any impression on the British Charts.

The album, The Kissing Game, was set for release in April, 1991. During the remainder of January and throughout February and March, Respect rehearsed their live band at a Sheffield rehearsal studio. At the same time, Jack Stephens organised 'dance' re-mixes of selected tracks and had them promoted in London clubs; he also secured press interviews and reviews in the influential monthly press, 'Q', 'Select' and 'Vox'. Then, on the Monday of the week of the album's release (album reviews had already begun to appear), Peter Robinson was sacked as head of A&R at Chrysalis. Respect travelled immediately to London to establish whether their relationship with the company, and the imminent release of their album, had been jeopardised by his sacking. As Josie Robson put it,

> I don't even know who we spoke to, it was quite apparent within the first ten seconds that we weren't welcome and there wasn't going to be a reprieve ... The

> only thing that sticks in my mind is leaving Chrysalis, we walked out of the back-entrance which was very significant and there was a skip full of our CD's and I thought, "we argued about this cover for months, they spent £100,000 on this and they've thrown it in a skip, they've skipped my life". (Robson, ibid)

Although Jack Stephens' reaction to Respect's being dropped by Chrysalis was combative (we don't need them, we're going to get a new deal' - as Robson reports it), relations between him and Respect collapsed almost immediately over matters of business that must lie outside this study. Within a month, Richard Hartley left Respect and a few weeks later Josie Robson's relationship with Malcolm Walmsley also collapsed. In a sense, all traces of musical and personal relationships that had lasted for over a decade were wiped out within two months of Respect's sacking from Chrysalis.

2. Roadhouse and Roadhouse.

Roadhouse was formed by two Sheffield guitarists, Richard Day and Pete Willis in early 1987. Willis was already known as one of the two lead guitarists of Def Leppard, one of the most successful Heavy Metal bands of all time. Willis had left Def Leppard in the early 1980's, trailing stories of drink and drugs excesses (Steve Clark, his co-guitarist in Def Leppard, died of similar excesses several years later). When Day met Willis in late-1986, the latter had already been attempting a return to record-making for some time. After a few exploratory rehearsals, Willis and Day began to collaborate on writing and recording new material. The relationship almost immediately became an intense one. Day gave up his 'day job' ('a very easy and well-paid job ... with British Telecom') and moved into Willis's house where Willis had installed an eight-track studio. At the same time, Willis was building a twenty-four

track studio at Crow Edge, near Barnsley, and both men moved into the studio's living accommodation on its completion.

What united both men, to the exclusion, almost, of all other considerations ('I didn't care about external influences anymore...we came across as very arrogant and strange to a lot of people..'[2]), was a shared 'vision' - an 'arena Rock band' they called 'EastWest'. In interview, Day was very clear both about the intensity of his relationship with Willis and about their own clarity, with regard not simply to the music they intended to make but to the entire conception of EastWest as a sound, a look and a 'story'. In the case of their creative, musical relationship, Day described it in the following terms:

> I had never done anything on that scale before ... When I met Pete it was like, "OK this guy knows what he's talking about, he's been through the ropes, he's done it before" and that's when I started really thinking about it in this serious and almost deep manner .. it wasn't just something I did ... it was like I hadn't just gone up a level, it had gone within me a lot more deep, I started to think about it a lot more .. in that period in maybe the first six months of meeting Pete and writing with him ... the learning curve was very steep, we went up together, we taught each other things, it was a joyous experience (...) we had the luxury of the time to write and record ... but you have to understand the magic of going into things in that detail, it became almost euphoric. (Day interview, ibid)

As for EastWest, Day observed,

> We had this vision and we decided to call it EastWest, it really did fire us up, in your mind you see the big picture of what you are doing and once you see that you can really push forward and go down it and you can choose people accordingly. (Day, ibid)

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[2] All quotes from an interview with Richard Day on 15/8/94.

The relevance of this observation is made more pertinent in this, much longer, observation by Day on what he regarded as the particular demands of creating a Heavy Metal band (although, arguably, his comments are of general relevance):

> public perception is *the* most important thing and if you aren't aware of how the potential record buying public is seeing you then you don't stand a chance ... if you're only talking about love, and love in a very superficial sense, you're talking about sex and riding in cars, getting high and things like that then by Christ you'd better be able to make people believe it and that's the only reason that Guns and Roses have been successful because they've made this absolutely false picture of being drug addicts and alcoholics and bad lads ... you look at those guys, you can draw caricatures of each of them, they're like a cartoon, larger than life characters ... if only people could see that with a rock band, a serious rock band, its all theatre, look at Kiss in their early days when they were wearing their make up, why on Earth were they successful? They wrote very basic, catchy rock tunes but they had this incredible image and when you went to see them it was "whoa, its a show". With rock that's incredibly important - if anybody out there believes it's all from the heart then I'm sorry, they haven't seen it because everybody, no matter how mean the attitude, has a choreographed show, make sure that they know how their fans are perceiving them and they keep that up. (Day, ibid)

In total, Willis and Day spent eighteen months working on material. In this time, other players were drafted in on a temporary basis, but were then rejected, sooner rather than later, with the exception of a singer. Eventually, a touring band was recruited but only after the album was completed. So fraught was the process of making this album that the live version of the 'vision' that Day and Willis had so carefully cultivated fell apart within a few months of the album's release. In turn, Willis and Day's close personal relationship ended and the two have not spoken since. The extent of the failure of what was to become Roadhouse was, then, absolute. Again, we need to explore the commodification of the act to understand why.

From EastWest to Roadhouse.

The collaboration between Day and Willis absorbed their time to the exclusion of all else until Willis decided they had generated the kind of material he felt able to take, not to record companies, in general, but back to Def Leppard's record company, Phonogram. In this way, what became Roadhouse 'missed out' many of the steps associated with what can be considered a 'conventional' path to the music industry - writing material, demoing it cheaply, forming a live band, circularising demo tapes to as many parties as possible, and so on. In this example, Willis simply returned to his former 'hunting ground' - not just because he enjoyed some access to it but because, for him, Phonogram *was* the record industry given their enormous success with Def Leppard.

Day collaborated with this 'strategy' because, as we have seen, he believed that Willis had enough experience to carry their vision forward - a vision that they had kept inviolate from any external influence from the moment they decided to collaborate. As it was, events moved very rapidly, but with a direction and momentum that neither of the two core members of what was still EastWest had any real bearing on. On this basis, despite their total control over the *conception* of the act they did not match this with any effective purchase on the process of its *realisation.* To understand why we need to look more closely at the 'Phonogram' they signed to:

> Me and Pete went down to see Dave Bates when they were still on Old Bond Street ... and we went in and saw Dave Bates and I was just like "this is what its really about" .. He says, "yeah' I like it". So, great, where do we go from here? We were very thrilled because he gave us some demo time at a place called Woodcray and then we finished the tape off, re-mixed in Sheffield at Axis and then we sent it him down and he said come down and see us. Before we knew where we were we were in front of the managing director of Phonogram at the

> time, a Swedish guy, I forget his name, and that's it, "we want to sign you" ..The initial contract was seven albums obviously with the option at every one but it was a one album, firm contract and then after negotiations with various lawyers we got the term down to six albums and if they'd taken up all the options, which of course is hypothetical, the advances would have totalled £1.7 million and that's what got bandied around all the press which I think did us a negative thing but you can imagine what it felt like to me, it had taken me two and a half years after leaving this comfy job ... as if from nowhere this thing had come ... basically I was blown away but at the same time I was a bit scared. (Day, ibid)

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, Dave Bates was a high profile and high status record company executive. He was the A&R person who had signed, amongst others, Dire Straits, Tears For Fears and Def Leppard and had brought Phonogram huge success. Bates had a reputation for autocracy (Day argued that the Tears For Fears song 'Everybody Wants To Rule The World' was written with him in mind) and this autocratic manner quickly came to register itself directly on Day and Willis.

> I personally feel that Dave Bates just loved being master of puppets ... you'd go down and see them, they'd spend shit loads of money on the hotels and everything, "is there anything you need us for? No" and then the following Monday it would be "get down here". ... he just used to like fucking you about. (Day, ibid)

Clearly, there is much *post hoc* bitterness in this observation but all of Day's remarks on the relationship with Phonogram devolve on the complexities of a relationship within a single, powerful individual. It was a relationship that clearly dominated the record-making experience and one that put the realisation of the EastWest 'vision' under pressure from the start. What, then, added to that pressure, and in an important way intensified the disintegration of Willis and Day's morale, was a wholly unpredictable development. WEA Records established the 'EastWest' record label which demanded a name-change. This unsettled them further, as Day noted:

> our lawyers sent us a letter saying "look lads, you'd better change this name ... WEA have set up EastWest Records". Now something as daft as that can really knock your feet from under you, you've built an attitude and everything around this name and then all of a sudden you've got to call yourself something else. (Day, ibid)

The enforced name change (to Roadhouse) dismayed Willis and Day and drained momentum from them. More draining still was the need to monitor, and develop, the prosecution of their 'vision' while attending to the completion of the album and the recruitment of the necessary members to complete the act and thus mobilise that vision. In this need to collaborate with the record company on not just the choice of tracks and their finished sound but also on the necessary promotional and marketing materials, it became apparent to Day that these activities needed to be *made* to happen, signing a substantial contract did not simply create a volition that somehow 'took care of itself'. As Day observed,

> We got signed then nothing happened, ... we thought we'd be running around like blue-arse flies doing gig after gig, interview after interview, at the same time as recording this album and we were doing nothing. (Day, ibid)

The reason for this confusion was that Roadhouse were managerless; at base, Day and Willis had concentrated on music at the expense of all else. What this meant was that they were left to sort out all the scheduling that goes with putting together an act and their album as a complete entity, entirely alone. Consequently, confusion reigned; band members came and went, there were disputes about payment and royalty sharing, recording took place piecemeal and (in Day's terms) the all-important work of creating a persona for the band that would 'make people believe' in Roadhouse never got underway. Substantially, EastWest was a fiction on signing to Phonogram. The record company understood this and trusted that Day and Willis

would recruit the necessary members to support the promotion of the album. But so 'lost in music' were Day and Willis that recruitment was very fraught ('we were very insistent and picky about what we wanted') and related matters were subordinated to their determination to create exactly the music they wanted. This 'subordinacy' of business, or commodification, matters was also, in Day's view, a function of his own misplaced trust in the ability of Willis to understand and handle this side of their joint affairs. As we have seen, he believed that Willis 'knew what he was talking about'. As he further elaborated,

> What I did with Pete was I tended to think that he had all the answers which ... went away pretty quickly as soon as the big picture became clear.. The thing is, we all believed that Pete knew how to do it. Initially, Pete was saying "we don't really need a manager". Now ... we didn't know any better, we thought "fair enough, this is how it is" but it became glaringly obvious to me, at that point, that, yes, you did, you needed somebody to give you some definite direction and keep everybody together. Basically, for the set that we were you needed somebody almost like a school-master ... we had no representation at all. Then we timed it totally wrong. When it became glaringly obvious that we needed management, it was too late, we'd already dropped too many big ones really. (Day, ibid)

For Richard Day, 'dropping too many big ones' translated into the recognition that they had 'let the record company get a hold'. From the beginning, Roadhouse ceded all non-musical decision making to Dave Bates, they had no manager to oversee and negotiate 'artist development'. By hoping that the vital issue of promoting and marketing the vision that they guarded so jealously would somehow take care of themselves, Roadhouse allowed Bates (if not necessarily encouraged or permitted him) to accrue total control over the commodification of Roadhouse. As we have already seen, Day felt that Bates manipulated them. For example, he insisted that they work with an engineer, Chris Sheldon, in the final stages of recording, but his

'manipulation' existed on a far greater scale than suggesting Day and Willis not work entirely alone. Day recounts Bates's blocking their attempts to sign a management deal with a company he disliked, dragging them down to London from Sheffield for superficial meetings, and demanding an 'Executive Producer' credit on their album when he at no time visited Willis's Crow Edge studio. Whatever the justice of these complaints, Bates displayed a clear disdain for the album when they at last presented it to Phonogram in December, 1990,

> We recorded the album at Crow Edge lock, stock and barrel, then we transferred the tapes down to London and we mixed them in Swanyard because that's where Chris (Sheldon) liked to mix ... and then Dave Bates turned around after a month and just said "no" and got the other people in. ... The guy who did a couple of the re-mixes was ... Mike Shipley, he's a bloody good engineer ... I went to see Chris Sheldon and he said, "you do realise that Bates has asked for it to be re-mixed?" and I said, "no ... it's the first I've heard of it" (and he said that Mike Shipley was doing it and that he'd worked with him before) and I said, "lets go and sit in on the sessions" ... and that never happened. Dave Bates wouldn't even let Chris near them ... we weren't even told when the re-mixes or where the re-mixes were being done, we didn't know, we weren't there, we were presented with them. We had no control over it. (Day, ibid)

In the above way, Roadhouse ended up with an album that they had no commitment to (because they felt it was no longer *their* album) and yet it was one they needed to promote in order to save their careers. More than this, Day and Willis as the founding and principal members of the act, went from a position of total belief and control in and over their 'vision' to one of no control at all over how they were presented to the public, on what terms, and with what effort and direction that presentation was made. Worse still, they had no control even over what *sounds* the public finally heard as Roadhouse.

As it was, their contractual obligations to Phonogram were onerous (Roadhouse was expected to sell 300,00 albums in Britain alone) and with no

promotional 'ground' prepared and no management support for the logistics involved in creating a market, they floundered and floundered badly. The album was eventually released in January, 1992, a year after its first completion. Sales were poor, the band had no accurate sales data but the record made no impression on the charts and neither did any of their three singles. Roadhouse played live to no great response (touring with Saxon was their most prominent outing) and, shortly after having new demos rejected by Phonogram, they were dropped from the label in June, 1992. Within a few months the band had split; more importantly, five and a half years after initiating a musical relationship that, in its years of experiment and exploration, 'became almost euphoric' Willis and Day parted company on the worst possible terms.

Chapter Seven:

The Formation of Latin Quarter.

Introduction

The narrative and analytical perspective on Respect and Roadhouse is something of a 'bird's eye view'. Where Respect are concerned, I got to know Josie Robson over a three-year period. In that time I learned fragments of the Respect story piecemeal. I also discussed Respect with Malcolm Walmsley and at least met Richard Hartley. My experience of Richard Day was less extensive. Discussions with him (prior to interview) tended to take place at gigs, at parties and in studios (I worked with various Sheffield acts in different capacities throughout the period of this research). As I began to know Sheffield better I began to gain an overview of its recent musical history. I did this almost entirely through discussion with other musicians but I was also helped by an essay on Sheffield's post-punk years by Tim Strickland, by the brochure for a highly successful local museum exhibition on Sheffield's musical past, and by a supplement on the more recent history of Sheffield pop acts in its local newspaper, 'The Star'.

What was notable about discussions with local acts was the combination of ways through which they defined and located their identity: partly with reference to their style of music and to other, well-known acts they felt close to, stylistically; but also in the very broadest terms of 'good' and 'bad'; 'music' and 'business'. Further, they would also place themselves in some narrative of their own genesis as musicians and in relation to other, contemporary and near-contemporary Sheffield acts (members shared with acts that had gone onto to 'make it'; gigs played on the same bill as local successes, and so on). Much of this ground has been covered in Cohen's work and I do not intend to furnish a Sheffield version of Rock Culture in Liverpool. The relevance of these observations, here, is that, by the time I came to conduct my interviews, I had developed a 'mental map' of pop music-making in Sheffield from the mid-70's to the mid-90's. This meant that I could concentrate on the details of the careers of Respect and Roadhouse without being side-tracked by the need for explanation of local venues, personalities, studios, other acts, and so on. Most of this is not apparent from the case histories, it is foundational and subterranean, but, more than this, once an act is signed to a major label, it loses its immediate markers and is faced with a need to re-locate within not just the physical space of a record company (its plush London offices) but, crucially, in its temporal and its cultural space (a crucial stage in the journey from 'the bedroom' to 'mass consciousness' - see chapter one). This re-location, this 'up-rooting', is perhaps what challenges all pop acts on signing a major deal.

By focusing more sharply on Latin Quarter, I lose the sense of geographical and pop cultural 'place' that fuelled my study of Sheffield acts - this is far more an account of an act that developed (and was challenged in and through) a very different sense of identity and self-definition. But what is lost in some ways, should be gained

in others: the more detailed our attempt to track the roots of failure to the commodification process; the more dense the interconnections between the principals can be seen to be. In the Latin Quarter case history there are more 'voices'. All of them have been encouraged into expressing *post hoc* rationalisations of 'what went wrong' and each account is negotiated with me, through me and, in the writing, by me. None is a 'jigsaw piece' because there are as many jigsawed pictures as there are informants, but the fact that each piece is dense and complex (because it derives from, or attempts to express, a 'whole picture') should convey, as it cannot convey in the cases of Roadhouse and Respect, just how many agendas there are in record-making and how much mental work goes into prosecuting often entirely different versions of 'the way forward'. This represents a difference in quality as well as in quantity and, consequently, I have elected to discuss Latin Quarter in two separate chapters. Further, the Latin Quarter record that failed, Mick and Caroline, was a second, rather than a first album. I do not consider that this invalidates the discussion of Latin Quarter - Mick and Caroline was still a first album for a major label - but it does mean, at the very least, that many important patterns of behaviour had been established before Latin Quarter began to record this second album; and also that expectations of it would be different because it was a 'follow up' to an album, Modern Times, that had, curiously, been neither a success nor a failure.

Modern Times had been released by 'Rockin' Horse' Records, a newly-established, independent label (discussed below). 'Rockin' Horse' was far too small to compete in the national record market and the company was sold by its principal founder during the sales campaign for Modern Times. This effectively killed the album but it had generated enough interest in Latin Quarter for the act to be signed by Arista Records (then a major in its own right, now part of BMG). Also, 'Rockin'

Horse' had licensed the album to RCA Germany and it was in the process of selling extremely well there when Latin Quarter joined Arista; this added a pressure that the other acts in this study did not experience. Despite these dissimilarities, there is much that remains directly comparable, particularly the fact that Latin Quarter ended with an album much like Roadhouse's - one that the company had insisted on re-mixing, and then not supporting when the re-mixes had been completed. This meant that the act was forced to promote a record it disowned, and that its record company that was not prepared to sell, in order to try to maintain its career. A more substantial comparison of the experiences of Respect, Roadhouse and Latin Quarter will be the work of the concluding chapter; here we can record that, although unlike the former two, Latin Quarter survived the experience, it did so only after leaving the label, losing two members, souring relations with a manager who had been a long-time friend and entering a downturn in fortunes that they were subsequently unable to reverse. In order, then, to identify those 'patterns of behaviour' that contributed to this impasse, we need to trace Latin Quarter back to its foundation.

The Song-Writers.

Latin Quarter was formed in late-1983. The circumstances of its formation were unusual. The band was formed to perform material that was already written. This material was the result of my collaboration with Steve Skaith. Again, unusually, this had not begun as a deliberate collaboration as such but rather an 'accidental' partnership that started as a sideline to Skaith's main song-writing activity, concentrated around his work with Steve Jeffries. Both men were signed to Chappell's Music. Skaith had begun to write in Liverpool. A friend, Eamon Kennedy, an established advertising jingles writer with access to musicians and studio time,

had asked him to write lyrics for already written melodies. Kennedy then 'demoed' (made a demonstration tape of) these songs and encouraged Skaith to begin the rounds of attempting to interest song publishers in this work. Through another London-based friend and musician, Richard Wright, Skaith was put in touch with Jeffries. Wright and Jeffries had met in Manchester where the former was a student at the Royal College of Music. They had helped form the band 'Bicycle Thieves' that included Howard Jones and on meeting again in London had helped establish 'The Inversions'. Wright played guitar and Jeffries played keyboards in what, by 1982, had become a significant act in the British 'jazz-funk' scene. At the same time, Jeffries was involved in writing material for a vocal group, 'Soft Touch', that had been established by his girl-friend, later wife, Mary Carew, with two friends, Carol Douet and Yona Dunsford. It was on this material that he collaborated with Steve Skaith, where Skaith provided the lyrics for Jeffries' melodies and arrangements and this material, together with other joint compositions, won them their publishing contracts with Chappells.

Even in this abbreviated form, a bare description of one individual's path into the music industry can be seen to combine a variety of factors that connect only tangentially with actual music - in this case, the existence of contacts who were able, firstly, to provide Steve Skaith with well-realised demo tapes that, in turn, convinced other contacts that people they knew, who were already working on projects, might take him seriously, and so on. Admittedly, what Skaith was attempting to do (become an independent song-writer) was unusual for its time, and it certainly bore no connection with what was happening in pop music in general. For example, when Skaith made his first music-related trip to London, in March 1981, post-punk rockers were expressing themselves either as a series of raiding parties on 60's music in a

search for fresh sources of energy (Dexy's Midnight Runners, The Jam, The Specials) or they were pouring that intensity into the circuits of newly available cheap synthesisers in search of a new club culture (Duran Duran, The Human League, Depeche Mode). Nevertheless, gaining a publishing deal with Chappell's, who were known at this time as the 'Rolls-Royce' of publishers and who, as Chappells-WEA, have since grown larger still, is to be very much part of the music business.

I had been a friend of Skaith's for some time before the developments described above unfolded. Their impact that all of this had on me was striking. As a schoolboy, I had been in the stereotypical 'three friends who form a band' for several years - but, crucially, not for any particular instrumental or vocal proficiency; I played percussion in a folk-rock group, sang backing vocals and contributed primarily by composing original material. My approach to composition was to sing phrases that somehow resonated with me. In the act of singing a particular lyrical phrase, I would simultaneously develop the lyrical *and* the melodic idea contained in the original expression. I would do this purely vocally, and commit the lyric to paper and the melody to memory. Then, in rehearsal, I would sing my latest song to my fellow band members who would translate what I had sung to guitar and we would arrange the song from there. This lasted for three years. In that time I built up a considerable body of material that abruptly lost any outlet when the various band members were dispersed by the ending of their time in school. I harboured the idea of somehow allying myself with a composer, but lacked the initiative to use the music press to find a collaborator. Equally, university led me away from popular music and into the Far Left where this experience, in turn, caused me to condemn pop as yet another aspect of 'Bourgeois Ideology'. Ironically, it was at this point that I met Steve Skaith. Even so, for several years, we were both a considerable distance from any

thought of collaborating as song-writers. His, to me, sudden transformation into a fully-fledged song-writer revived in me the buried ambition to write pop songs. That he responded so immediately and effectively to the first lyric I gave to him, seemed to re-connect earlier, imaginative circuits and, within a very short period, his writing partnership with me replaced his existing partnership with Steve Jeffries and this led, also fairly rapidly, to the formation of Latin Quarter. This recorded, we need to re-trace our steps and examine how Steve and I wrote, what we wrote, and why we wrote it.

The first lyric I gave Steve Skaith, in August, 1981, was titled 'Pyramid Label'. The method of its composition was identical to that of the material I had composed over ten years earlier: the simultaneous occurrence of a lyrical idea expressed in melodic terms; in this case, the phrase, 'I bought a record on the Pyramid Label' *sung* as a snatch of an, as yet, unwritten song. Understandably, there are no studies of composition by non-musicians; while, the general literature on composition tends to ignore how creative ideas occur in the imagination in order to concentrate on the structures of completed compositions. Despite this, it seems inappropriate to restrict creativity to the 'ineffable' and to carry on the discussion from the point of the finished and, crucially, usually published composition (where this, then, will also mean ignoring all the factors that led to the publication of that composition).

I have yet to encounter a satisfactory account of the part memory of 'heard' sounds and imagination play in combining to create new music and further discussion must lie outside this text, but I am impelled to report my song-writing in these terms. It is my contention that my ability to compose complete pop songs in my imagination is not a mysterious 'gift' - it is the product of a combination of factors in which, while

the particular combination might be unique to me, many of the factors so combined are general to all members of a society saturated in mediated communication. Put simply, all of us absorb huge amounts of information, willingly and unwillingly, and some of this information is musical information. On this basis, we might willingly choose to play a favourite record, attend a concert, go to a discotheque, or tune into a favourite DJ; but, equally, we might play music radio as a background to other activities, sit in a pub and have unwanted music played throughout our stay, sit through television programmes to which we have no great commitment but where these will almost always use music in some way, have music played as a background to our shopping or even when we are put on 'hold' by a business we may have telephoned. The construction of musical 'taste' (as the term 'taste' suggests) is as much sensual as it is cultural. Our culture makes available a certain range of music and musical usage to us, but individual appetite, socially grounded though this is, determines for us which music will have positive connotations, and which negative. On this basis, our memory will store-up sounds in the way that it stores other information, and we can draw on these sounds, and combine and re-combine them at will.

Often people will hum to themselves familiar and usually (but not always) favourite melodies. Arguably, equally often, humming, whistling and even sung snatches of songs can encourage some form of embellishment, extemporisation or improvisation. The combination of words with this music, a lyrical phrase on an improvised musical phrase, can suggest not that a song might be made from this coincidence of phrasing but that a song already exists in and through the existence of the phrase itself and it is left to the creative imagination of the phrase-maker to 'reveal' that song. How 'absorption' further assists this process is an effect of generic

reinforcement - we 'know' that a pop song consists usually of three verses, a chorus and a bridge of some kind and we 'know' also that the various pop styles utilise these standard ingredients in distinct, but not overly different, ways. Understood in this way, the one bar, twelve syllable phrase, 'I bought a record on the Pyramid Label' contained enough musical information for me to be able to estimate where, in an as yet 'latent', song such a phrase was likely to be. Once so estimated, I needed to chart a musical course that would take me to the end of the suggested song. This is not to make an essentialist argument in which only one 'Pyramid Label' song could exist, but only to recognise that the sung phrase would bear completion as a song titled 'Pyramid Label', of which an infinite number of variants could be generated from the initial phrase. The further work was then to develop, lyrically, the resonance that the sight of a 'record on the Pyramid Label' in my record collection had set up in my imagination. As it transpired, I used references to early 'Ska' records to connect the Rastafarian use of Old Testament concepts with contemporary conflict in 'The Bible Lands'. Whether or not I succeeded in this is not the issue; what is, is that I completed a song, an original composition, and I did it, again, not because I possessed a 'gift' for song-writing but because I had a *desire* to write (born of the specific way in which I had internalised the excitement of pop music from comparatively early childhood through to late-adolescence, and even beyond) where this desire had the chance, suddenly and unexpectedly, to become 'flesh' because of the coincidence of my knowing someone who, at least from my remote vantage point, had recently 'entered the music business'.

As I make this account of the writing process and my coming to a collaboration, I am aware that it can be read, partially, as a standard, 'being in the right place at the right time' version of the 'birth' of a song-writing partnership. My

account of the song-writing process is unsupported by reference to any more extensive literature on how compositional ideas are formed. In the first instance, I am aware that I am attempting to suppress the idea of the predominant influence of chance or fate for the reason that these terms are misused as part of ideological constructs that always conveniently erase traces of industrial decision making from popular products. Despite this, meetings between individuals who share common perspectives and aspirations can be random and, rather than deny what is random we should contextualise these factors in order to reduce our reliance on 'fate' as an explanation. In the second instance, I can only report how I experienced song-writing in a way that attempts to demystify it rather than represent it as a 'gift' or the result of 'inspiration' (in the fullest sense), and so on.

When I finally summoned the courage to give Steve a copy of the lyric I had written (I was nervous that he would react badly, not just to the lyric itself but on the grounds that I was somehow 'muscling in' on his publishing deal - which I was) I was pleased that his reaction to it was so swift and affirmative - on returning to London he made a crude demo of the song and posted a copy to me. His reason for responding so quickly to the lyric was, in part, and in his own words, 'because I found it so interesting' but there was more to his response than I appreciated at the time. In an interview, he discussed his early music industry experience in the following way,

> The irony is that Eamon was never interested in what I could do musically ... but, because I'd been to university and done an English degree, when he came to branch out from writing jingles and (needed) lyrics ... he approached one of his best friends who'd actually done an English degree. [3]

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[3] From an interview with Steve Skaith on 15/4/94.

The same terms then applied in his writing partnership with Steve Jeffries, as indicated previously. This meant that, on receiving a lyric from me, and one so removed from the material he had written jointly with his existing partners ('mainly love lyrics'), he had the opportunity, at last, to compose.

Although unexpected and unbidden, that I should have written a lyric was not, in itself, a surprise to Steve. We had played with the idea of collaborating on material at an earlier date, under very different circumstances. This earlier attempt, far more for its context than for any content (which barely existed) would come to bear on what the Latin Quarter experience would consist of. The circumstances of this brief, early collaboration were defined by the practice of the British Far Left and by the organisation, 'Big Flame', in particular. As members of this organisation we were caught up in every aspect of its activities. Despite a comparatively large literature on British Marxism, very few studies attempt to convey the actuality of commitment and how cloistered and saturating this can be for the individuals involved (what accounts exist tend to be fictionalised and related to earlier epochs - as in the works of Doris Lessing, Edward Upward and Clancy Sigal). Big Flame's politics can be defined, loosely, as Neo-Libertarian: convinced that revolution in Britain was imminent but aware that only a re-modelled Marxism developed out of a critique of Marxism's own past would be sufficient to the demands of that revolution. The 'critique' which needed to be mounted was one that re-investigated how power was exercised under capitalism - where the identification of the state as the repository and guarantee of ruling class power was felt to be insufficient and misleading. Instead, Marxists needed to be aware of how oppressive power relations were reproduced not only within the working class but within their own organisations (and therefore through

their own political practice) essentially in terms of the reproduction of hierarchies of power that reflected ethno-centric, patriarchal values. We carried this perspective over into our later approach to the demands of the music industry and to the practicalities of existing as a pop group. In the initial period, these politics also informed our collaboration in an explicit way but what was not apparent was that there was a far from complete 'fit' between our politics and our separate conceptions of pop music and of how this might be pressed into the service of politics.

If we begin with the second part of the last point above then, in response to my question, 'Why did you begin to write songs?', Steve's unhesitating reply was,

> Chile solidarity ... The Chileans, there's no doubt about that. The first song I wrote was called 'Santiago Boy' , the second one was 'Victor Jara' which was a lyric by Adrian Mitchell which, I later found out, Arlo Guthrie had put music to and recorded. It was definitely that, seeing all those Chileans in political meetings suddenly up singing songs. (Skaith, ibid)

When we first discussed the possibility of 'political' pop songs (but not, then, of writing them ourselves) I had no conception of the sources of Steve's inspiration and, essentially, he had no access to my, far less coherent, conception of what such songs should sound like. Instead, our common ground was the laborious work of maintaining a tiny, revolutionary organisation where this, in terms of fund raising (either directly for the organisation or, more usually, for campaigns that it supported) involved holding 'socials', or fund-raising social events. These were held on many occasions, by many different organisations and campaigns, throughout Liverpool, an almost entirely 'hidden' experience of music-making and use. Typically, a social would consist of a hired room, self-catered food for sale, a raffle, several speeches, and live entertainment followed by a disco. The 'entertainment' normally consisted of a handful of singers, either unaccompanied or accompanied only by acoustic guitar,

who would draw on a relatively limited repertoire of what would now be called, 'Politically Correct' material - usually Woody Guthrie, perhaps early Bob Dylan, Irish 'rebel' songs and industrial folk songs. Following this, dancing would begin and 'political correctness' would give way to the staple fodder of a disco that consisted of the type of material familiar from early 70's University discos - old soul numbers and chart hits. In all of this, the irony of dancing to the Rolling Stones' 'Brown Sugar', which includes the lines, 'Scarred old slaver, he's doing alright. Hear him whip the women just around midnight', seemed lost on the regular audience at these events.

When we recognised the phenomenon described above, our first attempt to 'up-date' the existing, collective repertoire was conceived *within the terms and conditions of that repertoire*, principally as 'agit-prop' songs, written for acoustic guitar, on themes more contemporary than the judicial murder of Saccho and Vanzetti and fighting in the Jarama Valley (moving though these were). When we came to write songs together three years later some, but not all, of these perspectives were still in place. Although we had both moved on from Big Flame and into the Labour Party, our politics were still those of the Libertarian left (then probably more prominent politically - in the figure of Ken Livingstone and in the policies of the GLC - than at any time since the rise of the 1950's New Left). Musically, our conception of the need for, and likely form of, politicised pop music had also moved on. But, crucially, this still bore no relation to existing expressions which, in the most general sense, were those of a large part (but certainly not the whole) of the developments that can be gathered under the general heading of 'Post Punk', described previously. Instead, at a general level, our concept of music was what we understood 'mainstream pop' to be: three minute chorus songs with strong hooks. Viewed from a distance, this conception was congruent with our shared cultural

(certainly, pop cultural) 'rootlessness'. As two people in their late-twenties, we could no longer consider ourselves part of any youth sub-culture; although, arguably, our continued existence as active members of the 'student generation' was a decisive sub-cultural location (one that is under-researched). Certainly, this 'Leftist' culture gave our song-writing its meaning and it was this that had to be re-located inside the music industry (rather than any locally- or provincially-derived set of cultural assumptions that might have informed the expectations of Respect and Roadhouse). The curious factor where we were concerned was that this sense of rootlessness was submerged under a strong sense of being powerfully connected to contemporary music-making in the form of Steve's publishing deal. On this basis, from the beginning, as a song-writing partnership, we were 'in' music, but not 'of' it.

In a sense, the preceding description of Steve's response to his receipt of 'Pyramid Label' as 'swift and affirmative' displays the danger of using the self as a research site - the fact that he responded *seemed* swift; equally, the fact that he responded, at all, *seemed* affirmative. It would not be useful to attempt to deny either quality but a caution needs to be raised. What cannot be denied is that I received a taped song within a month; that Steve enjoyed the exercise; that I then proceeded to send him lyrics; and that he began to spend more and more time working on them (so much so that, by the time of the emergence of 'Latin Quarter' I had given him 55 lyrics from which he had composed 29 songs). What the emotionally charged 'swift and affirmative' speaks from and speaks to is the effect on me of the completed and recorded song; which was, in a fundamental, if entirely unarticulated way, to confirm that I could be or, in fact, already was, a songwriter. This, then, is what the earlier reference to the 're-connection' of inner, imaginative circuits really means. The loss of song-writing partners at the age of nineteen; the failure to fulfil the ambition of

'becoming a song-writer'; the burying of a love for pop music under layers of Marxist permafrost - all seemed vanquished by the 'success' of the 'Pyramid Label' experiment; and in the flush of that success, both of us ignored the need to state our terms for this newly-minted partnership. Instead, in our excitement, we operated from the incoherent premise of the much earlier discussions about 'political pop music' and allowed our participation in the same Labour Left milieu to conceal the fact that our separate understandings of pop music were very different.

When I gave Steve Skaith the lyric to 'Pyramid Label', I made no attempt to sing him my version or to make any indication of musical approach in terms of tempo, arrangement, instrumentation, and the like. It could be argued that, principally because of the connectedness between poetic metre and musical rhythm, a lyric might induce the composer to compose in a particular style (a dirge would be an inappropriate setting for a limerick, for example). In the experience of collaborating in this way for fifteen years, the possibility of a lyric's innate musicality has not been borne out. Unsurprisingly, in this instance, the style of 'Pyramid Label' is Reggae. As he commented, Steve took (his) 'cue from the lyric, from the references in the lyric' but not from any metrical information, as such. In this instance, his composition satisfied me, more than satisfied me ('swift', 'affirmative') and I kept on being satisfied (apart from occasional hiccoughs) from then on. But being 'satisfied' with the results of musical collaboration is not the same as sharing a unity of purpose and a unified vision. What my pleasure and excitement in the first completed song unleashed in me was a vision of pop music constructed in adolescence - an adolescence that took place in the 1960's when pop music became central to British popular culture. I had absolutely no knowledge of how the music industry functioned, all I 'knew' was that great song-writers became great successes because they wrote

'great' songs. This, in turn, cast industry figures as people who would 'recognise a good song when they heard one' and supply the necessary logistical aid to record and promote those songs, to everyone's mutual financial (and artistic) benefit. Seated unhappily alongside this Disney-like optimism was the converse and equally confused 'understanding' that record companies were somehow 'bad' organisations that had no sensibility for 'art' and existed to corrupt talent and steal its money.

Both these last sets of ideas derived from the music press of the 60's and early-70's and the two notions mark, almost exactly, the transition of the weekly music press from a 'pop' press to a 'rock' press sometime during 1969 - when I first began to write songs. That neither depiction of the relationship between song-writing and record-making is an accurate one was lost on me in the earliest years of my collaboration with Steve Skaith. Instead, and in complete consistency with my practice of composing in the imagination rather than on an instrument, I located my 'songs' (they were only songs to me, they were lyrics to everyone else) in the interior landscape of my fantasy conception of how pop 'worked'. So, for example, and with reference to lyrics composed in the immediate wake of 'Pyramid Label', I envisaged 'Cold in the Clouds' as a 'Neil Young song'; 'Last Bus to Broadway' as a 'Dire Straits ballad'; 'Wherever You Are' as a 'Merle Haggard country song', and so on. And because he could neither explore this interior landscape nor hear this interior soundscape, Steve composed, and practised music, within an entirely different set of parameters. Even so, and even if we had been closer to the pop cultural 'tides' of the day, his were still not parameters that were informed with any greater sense of how the music industry really functioned. On this basis, we both had much to learn - although crucially what and how we learned would be contingent on the roles specified for us by our rapidly altering relationship to that 'unknown' industry.

For the purposes of this study, this lengthy account of how two individuals came to write music together is pursued to indicate how, if we study the interconnections between those composing individuals more closely, the fact of a composition (we can hear it, we respond to it in an individual manner) often *masks* the conceptions that the composers bring to the composition - where, quite crucially, these 'conceptions' are not simply conceptions of what a composition is 'about' but whether it is likely to be commercially successful or not. Further still, collaboration can also mask the differences in the conception collaborators can hold on what the route to that success should consist of - it masks the separate inadequacies of their understanding of what the music industry, as a whole, and what record companies, specifically, *do* to bring success about. Clearly, not all composition, even in pop, is collaborative, but the business of being a member of a pop act certainly is collaborative, because what will eventually be sold is the commodified *entirety* of the act - its sound, its look and its story. If, then, as in the case of Latin Quarter, two song-writers can be shown to have operated intimately and yet in ignorance both of each other's conception of what was happening and might happen to their compositions, then the potential confusion this can sow in a pop act can only be exponentially multiplied as more and more people become involved in the 'development' of the act that plays the music; the act that wins the deal and makes the record.

The need for Mediation, the form of Mediation.

If composing and making tapes of those compositions was the first step in the unfolding of what would become Latin Quarter, the subsequent stages of their transformation into released pop texts are entirely bound up with the actions of

'intermediaries'. Put very simply, (and in precisely the terms that Respect and Roadhouse recognised their own organisational insufficiencies), Steve and I could not 'make it' alone. Latin Quarter 'rose' from my nervously giving Steve Skaith a lyric in 1981 to a record contract for a fully-fledged band three years later, but there was nothing either pre-destined or, and more importantly, pre-determined in much of this. Rather, each encounter with an intermediary figure (with someone who argued that they believed we could 'make it' and that they knew how to bring this about) set up its own dynamic and these *separate* dynamics lent their growing energy to the overall momentum of an entity that became 'Latin Quarter'. Much of this process of combined dynamism was connected to the existence of a set of compositions and to the productivity of a compositional partnership; enormous amounts of activity and many layers of decision making were generated and carried out in the name of those compositions but it would be wrong to consider this complex inter-locking of tasks and decision making as being driven by those compositions, or that *the* compositions themselves, in some reified manner, determined which activities should be pursued and which decisions should be made. Certainly, the ranges of activities and decisions taken were determined by the need to transform compositions into realised texts (or proto-pop into pop) - to make records out of songs and sell them - but each connected aspect in the process of this transformation (the actions of each 'intermediary') had its own specificity. Each intermediary figure drew on his or her own field of expertise and associated culture of practice and the actions they initiated generated their own set of consequences. We will need to explore these observations in greater detail in the concluding chapter; here it may be more productive to 'encounter' the intermediaries that helped 'create' Latin Quarter in the way that Skaith and I did, and then explore how these 'encounters' inflected who and what Latin Quarter was

understood to be.

As earlier references indicated, Latin Quarter's first album, 'Modern Times' appeared on the 'Rockin' Horse' label. 'Rockin' Horse' had been formed in early 1984 by Derek Block, a leading concert promoter, and Jeff Gilbert who, until being invited to establish the new company, had been Marketing Director at CBS records. From the outset, Jeff Gilbert's signing policy conflicted with Block's motivation in wanting to establish a record label.

> His concept of the company was totally different from mine. His ... was, 'Let's do some T.V. albums. Get Johnny Mathis, re-record some old stuff, advertise it on T.V. and make some money"... He'd been a promoter which is totally different from being in the record business ... I wanted to sign new bands and see them be successful because I thought that's what I was best at. So I managed to talk him into saying "OK. you can have a budget for signing new bands" rather that get on and develop these T.V. albums, which we never did. [4]

Latin Quarter was Gilbert's first signing. He saw the band at the well-known London music venue, 'The Mean Fiddler' in July, 1984, on the recommendation of Andrew Pryor, at the time of writing Managing Director of the Parlophone label for EMI, but then in temporary retirement from a similar position at Ariola records as part of his convalescence from a major illness. Pryor had learned of Latin Quarter from an acquaintance who, in turn, had met Marcus Russell, one half of Latin Quarter's management team, and had been persuaded by Russell to make a small, but important, investment in the band. Russell, with Sean Clarke, had assumed managerial responsibility for Latin Quarter in the previous year - in fact, the band was formed on his initiative. This initiative came as a consequence of his and

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[4] From an interview with Jeff Gilbert on 5/14/94.

Clarke's determination to break into the music industry as managers. Their first foray consisted of an attempt to place a cover version of the 1965 hit 'Eve of Destruction' re-recorded by a local act from Harlow, where both men worked as teachers. Russell and Clarke made a forceful team. They had managed to arrange meetings with A&R departments at several major record labels which is, traditionally, a considerable achievement. At exactly this time, April 1983, I played Russell the earliest compilation of demos that Steve Skaith had recorded of the material we had written together. The connection in this case was a strong one; Russell was my oldest school friend and had joined Big Flame, as a result of my encouragement, several years earlier. We had also enjoyed success as local club promoters in our late-teens, presiding over the most successful Rock and Folk venue in South Wales for a short but exciting period in 1970 - this had given us both a taste for 'the business' (but very different conceptions of how it 'worked').

Though this sudden torrent of detail and names is perhaps reminiscent of the introduction to a Russian novel, its volume has a value in that this passing from hand to hand should again exemplify how contingent is the process of winning a record contract. In the same way that Steve Skaith won his publishing deal two-and-a-half years earlier, the currency in both cases was compositions, but neither example bears out the gloss that 'talent will always out': essentially, the currency is bitten into in each transaction and declared sound, but the route that this sequential exchange takes owes as much to connections as it does to talent. Once more, this is not to argue that the route is a chance one, at least, not entirely; this is not the accompanying myth of 'being in the right place at the right time'. There are too many 'places' involved, too many points of exchange, for chance to be the determining factor. But, from the point of view of how much of pop history is written (from a distance and after the event,

like all history) researchers need to beware of separating text from context - in the way that cliché does - and, on this basis, making either one or the other (or both, but singly) the sole factor in the 'rise' of a pop act.

By the time Jeff Gilbert saw Latin Quarter, this was not an act derived directly from 'Pyramid Label' and the subsequent compositions. Rather, in order to be in a position to encourage Andrew Pryor to invite Jeff Gilbert to see Latin Quarter, Marcus Russell, together with Clark, had not simply established a neutral management function that, somehow benignly, had helped two songwriters, thus far, along the route towards success (which, notably, is how he represents his involvement in the account furnished by Hewitt). Instead, distinct managerial practices had been established under the conditions of which some types of decisions were taken, and others ignored, and some methods of initiating actions were employed, and others not admitted; where these, in turn, had already had 'musical' results (they had affected how the original compositions now sounded). This is to make no judgement of value or of competence at this stage, only to suggest that the 'Latin Quarter' who played the 'Mean Fiddler' was a 'Latin Quarter' inflected with, and by, the accumulation of its interactions with the management team to that date; where the areas so 'inflected' were crucial in terms not only of how the compositions that formed the raison d'être of the band were performed for an interested record company but far more significantly in establishing that the act that played those compositions was the act whose identity was synonymous with them.

The Role and Dynamics of Management.

When Marcus Russell listened to the demo tape I played him, he was so enthused by it (and was already so enthused with the idea of being involved in the

record industry) that he offered to make efforts to interest record companies in my and Steve Skaith's material. There was no real discussion about whether or not this was a sensible course; it seemed 'logical' (our only other alternative was to try to 'place' the existing songs with other artists - already unlikely, given the nature of the material) and it was an exciting prospect, especially for someone with my hazy idea of how the music industry functioned. These attempts brought a quick return. In a diary I kept at the time, I noted that London Records, Stiff Records, Arista, EMI and MCA all 'kept the tape' - meaning that, following a meeting either with Russell or Clarke, the record company indicated that they were interested enough to keep the tape, and management details, for reference; and that Virgin Records, RCA and RAK were 'interested'. In print, these responses may seem, if not exactly innocuous, then certainly not dramatic, but this would be to miss the detailed sub-text of encounters between uninvited potential suppliers and a global industry completely dependent on fresh supplies of raw material (songs and acts) but unable to secure them in the way that a steel manufacturer, for example, might buy up iron ore mines and limestone quarries. As we have seen, it is the work of a record company's A&R department to buy in supplies. In this activity they face twin problems that are intractable: firstly, how to estimate what might be selling in two year's time (because, as a realistic, assessment, that is how long the transformation process might take); and, secondly, how to choose from the vast numbers of acts that exist at any one time. In terms of the latter, A&R departments encourage a type of musical 'Social Darwinism' - if an act has survived long enough and has been persistent enough to bring itself to the attention of A&R then it at least has a certain toughness and persistence to recommend itself to them. Further, Negus is right to suggest that it is not only the A&R department that introduces acts to record companies (as the involvement of

Andrew Pryor - incidentally one of Negus's respondents - in the Latin Quarter signing attests to). Despite this, A&R continue to have the responsibility of initiating 'artist development' *within the company.* But quite clearly, here, Russell had initiated 'artist development' long before a deal was signed, by arguing the merits of an act that, at this point, existed only in his head.

The only information that aspirant acts have to work on in the initial days and weeks of contact with the music industry, is that 'MCA have kept the tape' or that 'Virgin is interested' (and little or nothing more). Apart from the enormous excitement this guarded expression of interest provokes in act and management alike (not to mention family and friends) - and an excited state is probably a poor state in which to make decisions that have far reaching implications and effects - both management and act are forced to work 'blind' from this point onwards. They are forced to work blind precisely because of the guardedness of record labels which mutes expressions of interest and understates the particular motivations behind that interest (above and beyond conveying the general sense that they expect the act to be successful and that this must have something to do with what compositions the act sings and plays - they have only heard sounds at this point not truly considered 'image'). We can only speculate on the reasons for this guardedness but, arguably, its causes are likely to stem from a combination of three considerations:

(a). At any one time, an A&R department might be at this preliminary stage of contact with a comparatively large number of acts. While it will want to maintain the commitment of all these acts, and not lose them to rivals, it will not want to give the impression that a deal is likely at any moment, not for any altruistic reasons, but because departmental staff know that their budget allows only a proportion of contacted acts to be signed and that the level of involvement with acts, even at this

early stage, can be quite considerable. By keeping an act 'warm', but at a distance, they maintain the act's loyalty and commitment but they cut down on costs, workload and emotional stress.

(b). If it is fairly certain that an act is likely to stand a chance of success, an A&R department will do well not to stimulate outside interest in the band, (by helping to attract press attention, for example), for fear of alerting rival labels to the act's existence. If this happens, not only might they lose the act, but the act, or, more specifically the act's manager, might be allowed the opportunity to demand a better deal from them, in the knowledge that there is competition for the act's signature; the latter then connects with the third consideration:

(c). As was argued in the second chapter, all A&R departments work within budgetary limitations. When deals are struck, those deals, at least on paper, bind acts for considerable periods of time. The standard contract normally commits an act to a label for up to seven albums. What keeps costs down is firstly that the record label will reserve the right to an 'Option' clause, meaning that they are not bound to make those seven albums only that they must pay for the *recording* of the first album (hence 'record' contract); it is then their prerogative, their option, to decide whether or not they will attempt to sell that album and go on to make any other records of the act's work from then to the seventh album. At each stage, the act will normally be liable to an advance against anticipated royalties from sales. Traditionally, the act's management will 'commission' this advance (in Latin Quarter's case, Ignition Management - Russell and Clarke's company - took twenty percent of the advance) and both act and management will attempt to exist on this income while waiting for those anticipated royalties to materialise. Further, the proportion of available royalties that will accrue to the band is also not fixed and is the subject of negotiation

- companies might make different offers for different recorded 'formats' and there will be further clauses that relate to who pays for additional essentials like packaging, promotion, playing live and so on. Taken together, considerable sums are almost always involved, both in terms of initial outlay and in terms of who gets what, if and when the records begin to sell. At the earliest stage of negotiation, then, in the form of this early 'kept the tape' form of contact, an A&R department must indicate interest without showing itself to be hugely enthusiastic (even if this is true) for the reason that a manager, particularly a seasoned one, might demand advances, royalty sharing deals and agreements on the many 'extras' that will favour the act (and, therefore, the management company).

In the earliest stages of the evolution of Latin Quarter (from April, 1983 onwards), everyone involved was a beginner. The considerable interest which had been expressed in our demo tape created a momentum of its own. Because of the 'guardedness' of A&R departments, described above, acts and managers are left to 'second guess' the record company or companies. Russell and Clarke began to lead the guesswork and to develop strategies from it, and the actions they took soon began to impact on the direction (and form) of the proto-pop that had provoked their initial activity. On this basis, the strategy determined by management was based on the premise that if record companies would admit them, listen to the music and respond to it, then half the hard work of winning a record contract was already complete; and that what else was needed was a live band that was creating a 'buzz' - developing a reputation for memorable live performances that, additionally, might bring with it the attention of the music press. On this basis, they tried to convince Steve Skaith that, not only was this a sensible course, but that it was, in fact, the *only* effective one available. Steve resisted this logic for as long as he could. As he told me, 'I had no

real desire to perform, to get up in front of people, especially not as some kind of pop star'.

In the event, he bowed to this pressure, pressure I intensified by my own desire to progress from having the songs I had co-written signed to a publisher (the fulfilment of the song-writing ambition) to their realisation as the core of a successful pop group - thus re-connecting with the central and inexpressible excitement in pop music created in me as early as Lonnie Donegan's 'Tom Dooley in 1958 and intensified by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones thereafter. This is not a region of logic but of elemental force, and one that had connected Russell and me (and later connected Russell and Clarke) from an equally early date. As a minority of one, Steve Skaith sought the advice of Richard Wright. He agreed to form the core of a band but Russell and Clarke had already forged ahead. They booked a series of dates in and around London for late-1983, to the last of which they intended to invite all interested parties from record company A&R departments as well as the press and other associated and relevant sectors of the music industry. They then returned to Skaith and demanded to know why he and Wright were taking so long to assemble musicians. Viewed from a distance, their frustration was understandable and, even, justified - logic demanded the early formation of a band to capitalise on the popularity of the demo tape; but this is a logic that over-rides musical considerations and those vital considerations of who and what Latin Quarter were about. This was Wright's objection,

> It was too soon to form a band, I didn't mind doing a few dates, and helping to get the musicians together, but there was no need to rush to form a band, whoever we involved would need to understand, musically, what they were

dealing with and it takes time to get those sorts of people together. [5]

In the event, the initial dates were postponed, Skaith and Wright brought in Steve Jeffries on key-boards and Carol Douet and Yona Dunsford (from Soft Touch) on backing vocals, together with another friend, Dolly Hooker and, through contacts, Wright found a bass player, Steve Greatham who, in turn, brought in a drummer, Richie Stevens. Russell and Clarke then re-booked the dates and, in January, 1984, Latin Quarter made its first live appearance. As it transpired, the strategy of inviting record companies to the last of these six dates was modified as soon as it became apparent to the management team that the live act would need considerable fine-tuning before this could happen - there were problems with sound mixing, the commitment and availability of musicians, performance values and so on.

The 'live' experience changed how the 'principals' (Russell, Clarke, Skaith, Wright and myself) saw what was now called 'The Project'. Although the venues were obscure, they had attracted the attention of the pirate station Radio Caroline. One of Caroline's DJ's, Tom Anderson, began to play our demo tape on air. This was a remarkable and unexpected development but it helped to convince us (but, crucially, in different ways and for different reasons) that 'The Project' was on course. Further, the compositions around which the act had been formed, at least those songs played in that first live-set, had already undergone a major transformation (far ahead of any hint of 'artist development' by a record company). Questions of instrumentation and arrangement were being 'settled' long before any question of how those compositions might best be recorded would ever be discussed - in fact, in the

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[5] From an interview with Richard Wright on 14/4/94.

pursuit of the opportunity to record those compositions, much of the discussion about how best to record them had already been closed down by their rehearsal and performance as part of a 'live' set. From this point onwards, how certain songs might sound as records was already 'fixed', not just in the imaginations of those who had written the songs and those who had organised their performance, but also in material reality - which is not to say that it was impossible ever to change them again, but only to indicate that, once a song was rehearsed and established in the live-set (or discarded), this version of a song tended to replace the demo version and act as a template from which future versions might be generated; and, further, that these were 'living' templates in the sense that they consisted of the live performances, and imaginative, musical contributions of individuals who were now 'in the band', this meant, firstly, that parts could be changed only at the risk of upsetting a band member and, secondly, that if a band member left for any reason, their part would leave with them and any replacement player would bring their own signature to the arrangement, regardless of how they tried to imitate the playing of whomever they had been brought in to replace.

The Practice and Dynamics of Signing to an Independent Record Label.

This last condition (above) was eventually to have a significant impact on the making of Mick and Caroline; as it was, the initial upheavals in personnel benefited the band. After the first few live dates, Steve Greatham left for a Joan Armatrading World Tour and Greg Harewood joined on bass. His background was similar to that of Jeffries and Wright - playing jazz-funk with 'The Light of the World' and 'Central Line'. Dolly Hooker also left and was not replaced and it was this comparatively settled line-up that Jeff Gilbert saw at 'The Mean Fiddler'; enjoyed, and offered to sign.

'Signing a deal', as the first chapter argued, is the great goal of all pop acts but, again, it is only 'the end of the beginning'. Even so, as previous remarks have tried to demonstrate, *how* an act gets to sign a deal produces *what* act signs a deal. If the live performance of compositions 'fixes' songs for players and for immediate 'intermediaries' alike, they also fix them for the people who eventually sign the act. But even more is 'fixed' for the latter - together with the songs what was fixed at 'The Mean Fiddler' was an image of the act that Jeff Gilbert felt was worth investing in: songs alone are not enough, the act must convince a label that, when its product is taken to market, there will be buyers who will wish to consume not just their sound but their totality (sound, look, story). What Latin Quarter appeared to have was a winning combination of 'strong' material and a powerful image. The absence of a 'story', or at least one that a record company could understand (Marxist songwriters?) was always an impediment and, in the absence of an articulation of its point of origin, 'Latin Quarter' was 'destabilised' as a consequence. We will need to explore this further at a later point, here we need to recognise that the terms of signing Latin Quarter were ones far removed from the earliest collaborations between Skaith and me. As Jeff Gilbert expressed it several times on later occasions 'I thought I'd seen the new Fleetwood Mac'. On this basis, Latin Quarter had its deal because it was expected, by its record company to become a replacement Fleetwood Mac and not for any of the (largely unspoken) reasons any of the principals had in their heads. In all of this, the die cast by previous decisions was confirmed and incorporated, with this new and powerful addition and its consequences, in a new form.

Two essential tendencies in the evolution of Latin Quarter and the path to 'Mick and Caroline' were present in the act's signing to Rockin' Horse:

(1). Jeff Gilbert signed Latin Quarter because, in his words, 'they touched me".

> I remember saying to Steve, 'I think your music should be heard, I think you are saying things that people should hear at this point in time'. That's the luxury of having a little label. (Gilbert, ibid)

But Gilbert's having 'a little label' was the crux of the matter, for, in the sense of running an entire label, he was a beginner, as well, and he began with Latin Quarter.

(2). Latin Quarter signed to Jeff Gilbert, to 'Rockin' Horse' Records *because they had no-one else to sign to.* At bottom, the Ignition Management strategy of becoming a high profile live act had failed. The interest the management team had generated in the demo tapes during the Summer of 1983 had had to be kept alive for almost a full year before there was a band ready to perform for interested record companies. It is fair to argue that this delay was due largely to lack of foresight: in suggesting in the very first contact with record labels that the demos were the work of a band; and, when assembling a band, in underestimating the time and effort involved in preparing the band to a level that would improve on the impression already created by the material which had stimulated the interest of record labels in the first place.

In neither case can the strategic flaws, described above, be laid entirely at the feet of Russell and Clarke. The only consistent note of caution throughout the episode was struck by Richard Wright, everyone else gave their support either tacitly, by not resisting overmuch (Steve Skaith), or wholeheartedly (me, band members, other close supporters who, by this time, formed a kind of 'inner cabinet'). Even so, all of this lengthy period was spent 'working blind' for the reasons outlined earlier; yet, throughout the entire experience, the management team pretended to have sight. For much of the time they conducted themselves very much like football coaches

(Clarke coached a local soccer side, Russell became heavily involved in a local rugby side - an interesting connection with both Frith's and Negus's use of sporting metaphors to convey what intermediaries attempt to do). Their interactions, particularly those with, the band, came to be little more than pep talks to keep up morale while they continued to conduct a 'secret diplomacy', primarily with record labels, but also with figures from the wide range of agencies involved in the life of a pop act - publishers, promoters, publicists, designers, sound engineers road crew, design consultants, and the rest. Ultimately, Russell learned to 'see' through familiarising himself with the demands of 'working blind'. As he expressed it himself, with reference to events even later than these,

> You've got to bear in mind that I didn't know what I was doing. I was a reactive manager ... I was spending nineteen and a half hours a day just reacting to the force of the market, you don't even have five seconds to think about what's going to happen in six weeks time because you're inexperienced. [6]

Understood in this way, and however unimpeachable his motives, Russell's 'learning to see' came at the expense of Latin Quarter's contusions, fractures and near-fatal injuries. Further, he was only transmitting to the act a limited version of what it was that he was learning. In this way, 'collective decisions' (Latin Quarter held lots of 'band meetings' with Russell and Clarke) were taken on the basis of partial, and sometimes mis-information. For example, signing with Rockin' Horse came after the initial interest of the majors had waned as a result of being made to wait so long to see the 'live' Latin Quarter (a year). When it came, the deal appeared to have saved the day, but 'appeared' is the operative term.

The originating terms of Rockin' Horse as a record label were not

encouraging. Firstly, despite his years of experience in the record industry, Jeff Gilbert did not have direct experience of A&R nor of overall control of a record label; secondly, although his relationship with Derek Block was a close one, both men understood the function and purpose of the record label differently; and, thirdly, while, in Gilbert's own words, 'we owned the company fifty-fifty', all the working capital was Block's. For Latin Quarter, Rockin' Horse meant salvation, but signing with them (in August, 1984) was not the fulfilment of the frantic expectations of the previous fifteen months. After a year of expecting to sign a deal with a major record label, Latin Quarter signed with an independent label that had no pedigree and, more importantly, had been created on terms that were vastly different from those which drove the, by this time well-established, independent record sector. Put simply, Rockin' Horse was no 'Rough Trade' or 'Factory' or 'Mute', 'Postcard', or '4AD'. The label had not been formed with Punk or post-Punk energy to achieve what Punk and post-Punk tried to achieve - an outlet for successive 'New Waves' of British music shunned by the major labels. Instead, an established, not to say 'Establishment' promoter (of acts like Shirley Bassey and Tony Bennet) had decided to dabble in the record industry, but still on familiar ground ('Get Johnny Mathis, re-record some old stuff...'). That Gilbert was able to manoeuvre around this founding premise in order to 'sign new bands and see them be successful', did not mean that he had found any new sympathy with the philosophy of the independents. Instead, his conception of what a record company should be about remained the one developed throughout his years with CBS - to sign acts that would have a broad enough appeal to sell large numbers of albums. This was good for Latin Quarter in the sense that someone from

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[6] From an interview with Marcus Russell on 6/4/94.

a major, and *mainstream,* background could imagine their fulfilling that role (despite the implied caveat that the signing was an indulgence made possible by running 'a little label'). What was bad for Latin Quarter was that no-one recognised that the band had 'fallen between two stools'; on the one hand Rockin' Horse did not have the resources enjoyed by a major label to translate potential into sales; on the other, Latin Quarter, as an act, would enjoy none of the kudos that came with being signed to an 'indie' label. Finally, the label signed the act *to be* a mainstream act, and no-one involved truly took this on board.

What the Rockin' Horse experience amounted to was a collection of comparative new-comers 'shadow boxing' the record industry for a year (which is as long as the label lasted). Rockin' Horse had a staff of only four people, including Gilbert. Two of the four were nineteen year-olds. One of these, Helen Lee, was appointed as a one-person Press and Promotions department as a result of her persistence in sending Gilbert hand-written, photo-copied fanzines from Liverpool. This meant that Latin Quarter's press campaign was devised and conducted by someone who had never lived in London and had no experience whatever of the music industry or music press. In the meantime, Gilbert attended to Radio promotion (with the help, when required, of an expensive, but effective, 'plugging' company, 'Ferret and Spanner') mainly through an informal list of contacts built up during his CBS days. In this relaxed but largely unfocused atmosphere, the band produced an album, 'Modern Times', that it 'lost' in the dissolution of 'Rockin' Horse'. Preparation for the making of Mick and Caroline needs, then, to be understood against this background.

Chapter Eight:

The Making of Mick and Caroline:

the Unmaking of Latin Quarter.

The Practice and Dynamics of Signing to a Major Record Label.

Latin Quarter signed to Rockin' Horse Records in late-August, 1984. Almost exactly a year later, the company was sold to Arista Records. When I asked Jeff Gilbert why Derek Block had sold Rockin' Horse so soon after starting the company, he replied,

> A question of money. He'd spent £320,000 ... We hadn't wasted it, it just takes that much money to pay the wages of four staff, make two albums, sign two acts and give them advances; it just takes that much money. And Arista came along and said, 'We'd like to sign your label because we want those two acts and we'll take Jeff as part of the deal'. Now, I would have said 'No' but I couldn't say no because I didn't have enough money; it was Derek's decision whether he got his money back and walked away, which he did. He got all the money back and then he got a point on every Lisa Stansfield album, he made a lot of money ... I don't

> blame him, he'd found out that the record business wasn't what he thought it was. (Gilbert, ibid)

Block's decision shows how insecure was Latin Quarter's tenure at Rockin' Horse; but, again, the facts of the general insecurity of existence in the record industry were not absorbed. Rather, the transfer was presented, by Ignition Management, as a good move; as, in fact, the long-anticipated move to a major label, instead of being the only practical course which existed under the circumstances (there was nowhere else to go and Modern Times was still in the process of being sold). The fact that the Rockin' Horse team and artist roster moved together to Arista helped to preserve an illusion of continuity; but, in reality, continuity could not *be* preserved.

The fact that the continuity of Latin Quarter's existence as a recording act had been disrupted would not register until the completion of Mick and Caroline. That this was the case is largely attributable to the nature of relations between the act and its management whose role began to change under the new pressures associated with life on a major label. We will need to return to Marcus Russell's account of these changes at a later point, but we can record here that the changes were not simply quantitative in kind. When Latin Quarter joined Arista it joined a company with a large staff and a large number of acts. As remarks in chapter four indicated, we can usefully compare a major label with a large, commercial airport: in order to ensure that journeys begin on time (and that there are no collisions), each album is allotted a take-off time, runway and flight path. To miss any of these can cause huge delays and much confusion. Under these circumstances, management responsibilities were forced to undergo a *qualitative* change - Latin Quarter was no longer a privileged and protected entity (despite the Rockin' Horse re-location), there were new schedules to

obey and far more departments to deal with in the preparatory period of recording and release. Additionally, Modern Times had become a hit in Germany. The album rapidly charted, reached number twelve and sold, eventually, over 140.000 copies. This added to management's workload - a high level European tour needed to be organised and a new set of scheduling pressures was added to the existing load. Further, and at exactly this time, the single 'Radio Africa' became a hit in Britain. Ultimately, this record was to fall victim to upheavals inside Arista (see below). Before we consider this we need to appreciate that, from a management point of view, it may have appeared desirable *that the band simply* agree to whatever suggestions it made in response to the unremitting series of demands thrown up on and by every 'front'; yet, what they faced, and what Marcus Russell increasingly faced alone, was an act that, if not exactly impossible to manage, was constitutionally difficult to direct.

We have seen that, even in the very earliest stages of its formation, there was tension between the principal members of 'the Project' (Russell's frustration with Skaith; Wright's frustration with Russell, to identify just two). These tensions never abated; instead, not only did they grow but new and even more intractable ones grew alongside them. As the pressure mounted, tensions generated by conflicts between the need for management to set targets and the nature of the band's responses both to the time-tables associated with those targets and frequently to the targets themselves began to polarise band and management. Ultimately, all of these conflicts swirled around the figure of Steve Skaith who, as *de facto* leader of the band was restricted in his ability to deal with the central tensions surrounding the band (and therefore his own, joint, compositions) for a series of complex reasons. Among these we can identify three deep-rooted impediments (although, understandably, not in any order

of precedence).

(1). The 'operating principle' of Latin Quarter's founding were the songs Steve and I wrote together. These songs excited record companies; and, what became Ignition Management (Russell's firm), determined that an active band be formed to play those songs. In terms of the range of lyrics I sent him, Steve Skaith's inclination was to write around those with a more obviously 'social' content (although Mick and Caroline reflected this less clearly than did Modern Times). The notion that Latin Quarter was a 'political' band, however, came to attach itself to the act rather than it being a conscious decision of the act to promote itself in this way. What 'politics' *did* inform Latin Quarter was the libertarianism of our joint pasts (Russell's included). The two main effects of this were, firstly, to quickly initiate a non-sexist policy with regard to the act's women singers (which led, ironically, to the 'new Fleetwood Mac' tag); and, secondly, equally quickly, to initiate an unarticulated sense of 'democracy' among the act's members. The further effect of this was to make decision-making a slow process; it also generated an inchoate, but powerful, resistance to any management or record company request or directive that appeared to compromise the never-articulated 'integrity' of the band. This was particularly true of Skaith's own resistance (consistent with his initial reluctance to form a band) to any action on his part that might be construed as violating the principles of an active socialist (where he felt particularly exposed to the scrutiny of his peers in the context of his ongoing commitment both to the Labour Party and various political campaigns - notably the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign). Clashes with Russell and Clarke and also with Jeff Gilbert are too numerous to recount, but the root of most, if not all, of these lay in this soil. At base, Latin Quarter, in keeping with the Far Left heritage of its founders,

was especially good at saying what it was opposed to, and indescribably bad at saying what, in detail, it was for.

(2). Steve Skaith was further restricted by the intractability of tensions surrounding individual musicians. Both management and record company were united in their dislike of Richard Wright's role in the band. Wright, on the other hand, was not only Skaith's oldest friend, he also valued Skaith's compositional abilities and was concerned that developments within and surrounding the band consistently compromised the musical needs of those compositions. On this basis, he offered a consistent pole of resistance (and therefore a persistent source of discomfort) to both management and record company. Given Steve Skaith's own resistance to much of what came from these external sources, his loyalty to Richard Wright was consistently reinforced. Even so, this tension could only have been distracting and draining.

(3). There was further tension for Skaith throughout this period in that not only was a personal relationship with Carol Douet foundering, but that she and Martin Lascelles began to develop a new relationship. This meant that the rehearsals, live performances and tours of the period were continuously highly-charged affairs (about the only connection Latin Quarter ever had with Fleetwood Mac.). Again, this can only have been demoralising and draining; it certainly was not a background against which to articulate any counter positions and courses to those initiated by management.

All of the above conditions fuelled the growing polarisation between Latin Quarter and Ignition Management and Arista, but what added to the confusion (and fuelled the tension) was that the lines of the demarcation of this polarisation were never clear-cut and all the various permutations of diplomatic allegiance obtained at

different times. Even so, what underscored these polarising tensions were three further conditions: firstly, there was a growing resistance within the band to either management or record company involvement in musical decision making. That much of this 'involvement' had already *been* registered had gone unnoticed by all save Richard Wright. As the tempo of events continued to quicken, and the volume of decision making continued to expand, the band increasingly demarcated its sphere of competence as that of its music, upsetting both management and record company's sense that this area was, equally, in their respective fields of competence (the fraught area of 'artist development'). Secondly, all of this was set against the inexorable passage of time, hit records need to be consolidated and followed-up, Latin Quarter's surprise breakthrough in Scandinavia, Germany and the Benelux countries established its own momentum. Thirdly, Latin Quarter joined Arista just as Arista was about to be merged with RCA Records, a merger that led to a large number of redundancies (particularly amongst Arista staff) and, in effect, paralysed the newly-emergent British arm of BMG for a significant period.

As he became aware of this last condition, Russell became increasingly dismayed, but he kept the information away from Latin Quarter (for fear of its corrosive effect on morale). All of this added new strain to the relationship between act and management as well creating high levels of tension between management and record company. As Russell put it,

> We were dealing with a very inexperienced record company. That record label bought us because it had extra cash. Arista Records-Britain was then, and is to-day, a loading bay for American-signed, Superstar product. ... They were still ... responding to the British explosion in independent labels and independent music which Punk Rock had initiated, which told them that their existing A&R departments were inadequate so they responded by buying labels ... We were sucked into an economic trend, it was nothing to do with what the music was

> like ...We ended up with a major label and had a hit very soon afterwards and that major record company was totally inexperienced in how to deal with it. ... There was a lot of shit going on at the time that you don't even know about ...Arista weren't even talking to RCA. All of a sudden there's this hit single in the charts and RCA's distribution and sales forces were completely unprepared for it ... gossip said that Arista would close once the BMG take-over was complete, there was a bad vibe and RCA London was looking out for itself. (Russell, ibid)

Understood in this way, what Latin Quarter had joined was not simply a major label in transition but a major label in chaos, and chaos is no place in which to make records. Understandably, and even while protected from full knowledge of that chaos, the band picked up on the tensions in and around the Arista building - a mansion in Cavendish Square that contained over seventy staff - plenty of space and opportunity for rumour to reach band members. This helped, then, to polarise band and record company, while, at the same time, the band became increasingly locked into a polarisation with its own management, an entity that had its own problems (increasing tensions between Russell and Clark, primarily over inequalities of work-load) but one that afforded Marcus Russell an education in the practices of the record industry that encouraged and reinforced the determination he had displayed from the outset of 'The Project' to assert his competence in management affairs. His determination was fed, arguably, by the high levels of adrenalin needed to contend with the enormous pressure imposed by the demand to meet constantly appearing deadlines and also with the relentlessly aggressive and ambitious people that inhabit the international record industry.

The Record Label and the Search for a Producer.

The record that was to be titled Mick and Caroline went into full production at the 'Wool Hall' studios at Beckington (south of Bath) on the 6th of October, 1986. The studio was the choice of the album's producer, Jason Corsaro. Corsaro was the

majority choice of the band for producer but that choice was the product of fierce controversy with both management and record company - where this controversy was at once the product of the growing polarisation among these three key elements and also its clearest articulation yet. To understand why, we need to trace the route of each 'element' to the point of beginning to record Mick and Caroline.

No 'inquest' was held into the fate of Modern Times. The album was simply 'lost' in the transfer to Arista. In the first instance, Rockin' Horse's lack of personnel and 'muscle' had meant a minimal campaign in Britain; although, freakishly, 'the single 'Radio Africa' had become something of a *cause célèbre* for some DJ's and also for Jonathan King who, at the time, had his own television programme, 'No Limits'. King vowed that he would 'make 'Radio Africa' a hit' and played the record week after week on national television. Unfortunately (ludicrously, even) not only did the transfer to Arista happen at exactly this time (which meant that the record company had no team in place to build on this promotional 'gift') but, as Jeff Gilbert put it,

> Lots of people (at Arista) didn't like you. But that's the ... function of the music business, you take one person's belief in an act and you have to fight the rest of the world to make them believe in that act. (Gilbert, ibid)

And further,

> The (Arista) sales force was amalgamated with RCA's sales force and RCA also took over a lot of the support services like Business Affairs, Accounts etc. (A large part of Arista's staff) .. were victims of rationalisation during the merger. (Gilbert, ibid)

If we incorporate the need to win over large numbers of Arista staff to the side of Latin Quarter into the time-scale of the release and promotion of Modern Times then the album was doomed from the moment of the take-over. Modern Times had already

been on release for six months, the physical effects of the transition soaked up at least another three months of 'dead time', and then came the hurdle of winning over doubters and the hostile in an atmosphere charged with redundancy and the threat of redundancy. 'Radio Africa' suffered as well. It lasted four weeks in the Top Thirty: even with a 'Top of the Pops' appearance, there was simply no-one to sell the record in the market-place. Under these conditions, the management team 'put on a brave face' and the disappointment of the loss of Modern Times was sublimated by a new, but intense, concentration on producing the next album. From Gilbert's point of view, he did what a head of A&R is expected to do, he began to make records and he began with Latin Quarter.

Sas Cooke, Gilbert's 'second-in-command' who had transferred with him to Arista, began to set up meetings with producers. On the eighteenth of October the band met Ken Scott, best known for his production of 'Hunky Dory' and 'Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars' for David Bowie and the two big-selling Supertramp albums of the mid-Seventies, 'Crime of the Century' and 'Crisis, What Crisis?', but no commitment was forthcoming from the band. Just over two weeks later, the band met the Australian producer, Gary Bell but, again, no commitments were made. Both meetings were polite affairs but, as Steve Skaith put it,

> There was a resistance, I had a resistance to this record company thing -"Oh, you need a producer, you have to have a producer because they know how to make records and you don't ... " Their argument wasn't very well motivated given that we'd just produced an album that everyone thought was great, but didn't sell. So now (it was) 'let's go for the big one, spend a lot of money'. And that was coming from everyone, from management as well. It was patronising and, from time to time, I really resented it ... but I'm not saying my position was absolutely right. (Skaith, ibid)

Skaith's observation is central to the tension surrounding the issue of whether or not to engage a producer, but his was a resistance (a resistance shared, in large measure, by the rest of the band) that took place against a large-scale ignorance of what had happened at Rockin' Horse and what was happening both at Arista and between Arista and RCA. At base, acts have no real working knowledge either of how their records are selling or of how records are sold. Certainly, acts play a key role in the promotional campaign (although the marketing campaign, the key site and focus of 'artist development', is more fraught). They do so because it is glamorous (lots of TV and radio appearances and foreign travel) and because they want to sell records. But, in my experience, and in the experience of all the acts I have spoken to over the years (and not just Respect and Roadhouse), there are never occasions when the condition and the results of sales campaigns are discussed with acts. Thus, acts are never party to the vital information they require in order to understand whether or not their record is likely to be successful or is, in fact, already 'dead' as far as shops are concerned. Rather than be included in briefings on sales procedures, marketing strategies and on methods for monitoring these, acts are left in the position of consumers, struggling to construct an impressionistic account of their 'status' and the fortunes of their work gleaned from exactly those sources from which consumers make their own judgements about acts - record review columns and the remarks of radio DJ's before or after the scattered plays of their latest record. Arguably, acts who have short-lived record careers never fully enter the world as 'producers' in as ----- complete a way as Negus suggests they do. Certainly, acts have better information than do consumers, impressionism will not be fully sloughed off until the act has become successful enough to demand - or have its manager demand - the kind of hard information necessary to grade, not just the degree of immediate success, but

prospects for the future. Pop acts need to be aware of how a company views them in order to secure their position (*cf* Respect and Roadhouse's deficiencies here) but this awareness can only be developed from exactly the information they have least access to.

Because the act was not party to the extent of the stress and chaos 'behind the scenes' at Arista, then its resistance to the need for a producer was, in fact, 'unreasonable' in the true sense that it was a position based far more on prejudice than on calculation. Ultimately, the questions not just of *who* should produce but of whether production needed to take place at all became Latin Quarter's battleground. But, again, it was a battleground that the act had not chosen and one that it simply could not reconnoitre for want of hard intelligence on the extent of the changes in their own status and the status of all the intermediaries they had so far been dependent upon. As Jeff Gilbert observed about his changed role (from head of an independent to senior employee at a major):

> I was playing the game... everybody from every territory around the world was saying, 'Who's the producer of the next Latin Quarter album because it has got to be better than the last one and you have to get a producer in because Clive Davis won't even listen to it if it hasn't got a great producer producing it. So I was playing the political, A&R game. (Gilbert, ibid)

As it was, large numbers of private discussions went on, but there was never a meeting between all the parties concerned in which the issue of the extent of the changes experienced in the move to Arista were aired. Rather, Sas Cooke continued to circularise interested producers and the band, specifically the band's principal members, Steve Skaith and Richard Wright, remained polite, but lukewarm to her suggestions. Probably in no other industry could commitment to the need for major

investment proceed so ineffectually - where the reasons for the disappointing performance of the previous product are not analysed and no mechanism is set up to conduct the planning stage of the follow-up. In a sense, everyone used the quickening of the pace of events around Latin Quarter to postpone what promised to be a painful confrontation.

In the first six months of 1986, that 'pace' was at its hottest. For example, during the week of Latin Quarter's 'Top of the Pops' appearance, the band was involved in rehearsing intensively for a thirty-one date European tour, beginning with three British 'warm-up' dates and proceeding through Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and Switzerland to culminate with the second top slot at the 'Farewell to the GLC' festival in London. When a band is this busy, and also successful - the German dates were to promote a chart album - it makes sense not to confront them with, what all the signals indicate, is a difficult subject. Despite this, suggestions for producer continued to be made and a meeting was set up with Stewart Levine, producer of a large number of American soul and blues album and about to become renowned as a hit producer with the new Simply Red album. Again, no commitment to make an album with an invited producer was made. For the record company, and for management, this was a pivotal moment and much of the later polarisation took position around this latest refusal.

Jeff Gilbert expressed his reaction to the issue of whether or not to engage Stewart Levine in this way,

> I feel that if the album had been made with Stewart Levine, who wanted to do it and was blanked by the band, I thought we'd have probably made a better album. (Gilbert, ibid)

Gilbert's fairly cautious assessment (apart from the telling 'blanked by the band' to which we will return) is expressed in far different terms by Marcus Russell,

> We needed a producer ... Steve didn't want a producer. He felt he knew how to make records. I didn't. ... I found myself in a position where I felt we needed someone, we needed a third force, who had an empathy with songs and how a record of them should sound ... and when Stewart Levine wanted to produce Latin Quarter I thought, 'I can't believe how good this is'. Stewart Levine is someone who makes records, he's brilliant, at the time he was particularly brilliant. That day (when the band failed to take up the offer) something changed in me ... I thought, 'I know this business enough to know that you seize the moment'. There was such a bad vibe given off in meetings, it was sick. And it changed for Jeff. He said to me, "Marcus, we've got a serious problem. One of the top producers in the world just walked out on this band. You've got to talk to them" ... I'd defend the right of the band to decide their own producer, but inside I couldn't understand the decision not to go with Stewart Levine ... We never had the abilities within ourselves to make that record on our own. (Russell, ibid)

Understandably enough, the different band members remember the encounter differently. For example, Martin Lascelles observed,

> We had very good reasons for turning him down ... partly because he did have an ... attitude and that did put everyone off ... and he did start his string of hits slightly after he would have been producing Latin Quarter. [7]

Richard Wright refused to be quoted on the subject of the actual meeting with Stewart Levine but made the general point that,

> The producer's there to get the blame. It's like one guy, its invariably a guy, doing several guy's jobs because the record company and the manager don't understand all the specific responsibilities themselves. You hire a guy and you pay him a lot of money so when it fucks up you can blame him and not the artist, because you have to talk to them next week and you can easily sack the producer ... They pick these guys partly to have someone to blame when it goes wrong ...

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[7] From an interview with Martin Lascelles on 14/4/94.

> They aren't really addressing the specific issues ... hence the need to hire and fire. In the light of that, and conversely, real successful producers like Ken Scott and Stewart Levine aren't in the habit of being auditioned by young bands, interviewed and asked questions about their accomplishments. They are people who are brought in, paid by the record company to do a job and get their arse kicked if it's no good ... Stewart Levine must have said to himself (after meeting the band in this way) "Do I want to do this? No!" (Wright, ibid)

Wright's observations cast the dispute in a different light; by specifying the role of a producer as ' a catch-all ... an umbrella category... answerable to (every aspect of the recording process)', he re-defines the producer's role as one of strategic necessity for record company and management alike. Because, as Wright argues, the producer is 'there to get the blame', the entire future of an act is, effectively, contracted out to a single individual - but not necessarily solely for their musical abilities, as Russell argues. Clearly, what recommends a producer is that person's 'track record' - the number of successful albums they have been associated with, but, ironically, producer's *failures* are easier to overlook than those of the acts concerned. For example, by 1984, Ken Scott had produced four huge selling records, but he had also produced a dozen or more that had meant nothing at all. Rather like doctors, producers bury their mistakes. This, alone, is not enough to justify scepticism about the role of production, in general, and neither does it fully explain Latin Quarter's obvious antipathy to producers in this period (to which we will need to return). Even so, for the record company and for the management of Latin Quarter, it is clearly producers who make records out of songs, but if producers recommend themselves for reasons that are related to music, they also recommend themselves, in structural terms, for reasons that can only be described as political (if we interpret Wright in this way). Once a producer has been engaged, the head of A&R can go to the managing director and argue that the situation is in hand; equally, a manager can feel

satisfied that yet another stage in 'The Project' has been successfully negotiated and any and all issues of the needs of individual songs as musical compositions can be addressed with reference to the hit records associated with the producer. This, then, can lead a manager to make an observation of this nature:

> By that time I'd gained enough confidence in myself and my understanding of music to make value judgements that the leading figures in the band weren't good enough to make a record. They were great song-writers, great performers but they didn't understand the difference between putting a song on tape and making a great record out of it and I made that decision to collaborate with the record company on finding a producer; because I honestly thought the band weren't ... sussed enough to make a great record. (Russell, ibid).

Following the exit of Stewart Levine, the stage was then set for further confrontation.

Management and the Search for a Producer.

As the several quotes from Marcus Russell reveal, he felt strongly that Latin Quarter's next album should be produced by someone with a track record, by a successful, and, therefore probably, by a high profile producer. His frustration with the rejection of Stewart Levine is stark. When this is added to his growing collection of major problems - the condition of Arista, his deteriorating relationship with Clarke - and placed in the context of his frustration with the various levels of resistance from Latin Quarter as a whole, it is clear that the ingredients for major confrontation between band and management were growing throughout the intense period that culminated with the recording of Mick and Caroline. Before we consider what brought matters to a head and the consequences of this for the new album, we must return to the conditions of the growing polarisation between band, management and record company.

Latin Quarter's joining 'Rockin' Horse' was hailed as an achievement by band and management alike (the achievement of 'the deal') and certainly all parties encouraged each other in the belief that they were a 'team' who, together, would do well. This notion of 'team-work' runs throughout the Latin Quarter experience as a substantial undercurrent, exemplified in, and conditioned by, both Russell and Clarke's frequent resort to sporting analogies and euphemisms when preparing the band for collective work (playing live, meetings with industry figures, interviews, even photo sessions). The earlier stated notion that continuity had been broken by the move to Arista without its being apparent is traceable to the attempt made by the principals to sustain this notion of team-work in the face of the facts: band and management may have had to preserve the illusion of remaining a team, but the relocation to a major label destroyed the conditions for the inclusion of Jeff Gilbert (and through him the label) on that team. Under the terms of the new conditions which were never effectively explored (obscured as they were by the pressure of events and the ideology of the 'winning team') the mounting tide of confrontation led each component of that team to retreat into increasingly determined assertions of control over his own sphere of competence: Jeff Gilbert, as the intermediary between the band and the rest of the record label (as head of A&R) kept up the pressure to initiate an album without exploring the band's concerns about how that album should be recorded. Marcus Russell, as the intermediary between not only the band and the music industry, but the band and the market-place as a whole, held onto his knowledge of the label's chaos (and all of his, and Latin Quarter's other problems) as an expression of his determination to display his competence as a manager who could guide a band to the making of a successful album. In the midst of this, the band, led by Skaith (who was effectively incapable of leadership, preoccupied as he was by his

personal distractions), held out for a set of conditions for making their album that were never likely to be on offer.

In the case of the context of the making of Mick and Caroline, what, decisively, confused the already complex and conflictual pattern described above; and confused it to the point of its *musical* insolubility (in the sense that 'the album', as a body of music, was *never* going to solve all the problems), was the fact that, as remarks in the first chapter proposed, there are no clear boundaries to the 'spheres of competence', so indicated. The role of intermediaries cannot be subsumed under the title of an intermediary's function; as Richard Wright put it plainly and memorably in one row, 'Look Marcus, just book the hotels and leave the music to us!' In the early 'winning team' days on 'Rockin' Horse' the music felt like the collective property of all concerned. It was clearly what had brought everyone together, but when no instant results were forthcoming, none of the principals sat down and analysed this lack of immediate success (the 'team' was never truly a team). Instead, as frustration mounted and structural conditions were changed almost beyond recognition, each element 'retreated' in the way described above, but they each retreated with a sense of their original commitment to the music intact (seven players, a lyricist, a manager, numerous record company personnel). Further, the intermediaries retreated with an inflated sense of their competence in those compositions in the sense that their separate understandings of the music industry afforded them a sense of the industrial and market demands of the transformation of proto-pop into pop that was clearly not possessed by the band - for reasons of its structural (and contrived) lack of access to information about industrial and market practices. This relative information monopoly enjoyed by both management and record label then reinforced the belief of these intermediaries that they were fully competent in musical matters; which belief

they exercised most notably in the field of record production, both in the choice of record producer and control over the work of the producer. This is the true extent of the 'political' role of the producer referred to previously: the intermediaries will attribute all success, but also all failure, to the producer with the primary result that, whatever the outcome, their own 'competence' is assured - either ' the producer screwed up' or 'he was exactly the right person to produce this band (and I chose him)'. In this way they evade all responsibility for the effects their actions may have had on an act's preparation for recording - where this may stretch from how songs are written, demoed and rehearsed to what songs are considered for inclusion on an album with what players under what conditions.

By the eve of recording Mick and Caroline, the relationship between Latin Quarter and its management team (now, effectively, reduced to Russell, alone) was one infused with the highest tension. What brought matters to a head was the auditioning and appointment of a new drummer in Russell's absence (he had taken his first holiday for three years). The circumstances leading to the need for a new drummer were themselves fraught. Following Richie Stevens' decision to leave in the Winter of 1985 in order to pursue his own recording career, Dave Charles was drafted in. Charles was a powerful, rock drummer (Stevens had been a reggae drummer) and had been the mainstay of what had turned out to be a triumphant European tour. His abrupt decision to leave - he literally walked out of a rehearsal - caused the cancellation of Latin Quarter's British tour. Not only did this cause huge administrative problems, (which Russell was forced to cope with virtually single-handed), but it meant that Latin Quarter could not capitalise immediately on he limited chart success of 'Radio Africa', a fact that affected Russell's morale more than the band's, given his knowledge of Arista's glaring weaknesses. All of this led, not

just to a series of rows, (Russell was completely opposed to the new drummer, Darren Abraham, and made his dislike of Abraham's lighter touch clear on several occasions) but to a palpable sense of entrenchment by the parties involved. In the midst of this, Latin Quarter recorded 'America for Beginners' with Jason Corsaro.

'America for Beginners' had already appeared on Modern Times and was regarded by band, management and record company alike as the central track on the album, to the extent that Jeff Gilbert observed that this song was 'the reason I signed the band'. In concert, and especially during the European tour, the song had consistently received the warmest audience response. Everyone concerned had high expectations of 'America for Beginners' for a complex set of reasons that, ultimately (and obviously with hind-sight) devolved on the premature end of Rockin' Horse and the loss of Modern Times. Here was a chance to re-record a favourite song and have the 'muscle' of a major company behind Latin Quarter in the run-up to the release of an, as yet unrecorded, second album, (this time on a major label). If we also recognise just how tense all the principals were by this time (and exhausted after three solid years of activity) then 'America for Beginners' took on an exaggerated importance; not least, if it failed to make the charts, Latin Quarter would pass into 'cold storage' until a second album could be completed and new material released.

Jason Corsaro was recommended by Latin Quarter's American representative, Tony Meilandt. Meilandt was the manager of Herbie Hancock and the Fine Young Cannibals (his partner managed Simple Minds, UB 40 and The Smiths, all for the USA) and had met Corsaro through Hancock's work with New York producer Bill Lasswell. Corsaro's main job was as a house engineer at 'The Power Station', then arguably the leading New York studio. Earlier in 1986, Corsaro had received two 'Grammy' nominations for his work on the Robert Palmer album that contained the

US number one, 'Addicted to Love' and the Stevie Winwood album 'Back in the High Life' which also contained a US number one, 'Higher Love'. Immediately before producing 'America for Beginners', Corsaro had been involved with the Fleetwood Mac album, 'Tango in the Night', also a huge seller (though he was replaced by Lindsay Buckingham at an early stage).

Taken together, then, Corsaro had an extremely impressive track record and, from the band's point of view, the session with him was a huge success: Steve Skaith referred to the recording as 'a really brilliant weekend'; Richard Wright called it, 'by far our most successful recording session ever, artistically and in every respect, absolutely brilliant, it sounded great'; Martin Lascelles commented, 'everyone was enthused about working on "America for Beginners". That went very well. It was a very painless record to make'. Yet, despite how well the act felt about the single, both Marcus Russell and Jeff Gilbert were dismayed by the end result, to the extent that they joined forces and demanded that the record be re-mixed, particularly in terms of the relationship between the lead vocal and the rest of the track. Steve Skaith was despatched to New York to supervise the re-mix at the (very expensive) Power Station. It was there that he encountered Corsaro's cocaine usage. Taking cocaine was, and still is, rife throughout the music industry, but especially in the American industry. It is impossible here to digress into an examination of likely connections between drug use and the listening skills of producers and engineers, but cocaine does not make individuals easier to deal with. 'The re-mix' sounded little different from the original but it was released and the record was not a hit. It was simply swallowed up in the absorption of Rockin' Horse into Arista and Arista and RCA into BMG.

To discuss this last point above in more detail, it is clear from Jeff Gilbert's remarks that not all of Arista's employees were convinced that Latin Quarter could be a successful act. If we add to this the fact that there was a continuously high staff turnover at Arista throughout the period (so newcomers would have nothing 'invested' in Latin Quarter), that RCA staff were now filling some of the vital roles formerly performed by Arista personnel and that the former had no stake in Latin Quarter's success whatever, then the likelihood that the emergent BMG would add its 'muscle' to the 'America for Beginners' release was slim to the point of non-existence. In some senses, the release was a belated, and isolated, attempt by Jeff Gilbert to achieve at Arista what he had failed to achieve at Rockin' Horse - the mass marketing, in Britain, of Latin Quarter, and the release of his favourite track into the bargain. He was supported in this by Marcus Russell, who, by now, was desperate for some palpable Latin Quarter success that would give him the 'muscle' he needed to develop the act's wavering 'profile' - both within Arista and in the much wider 'world' market. In all of this, Latin Quarter just wanted another 'hit'.

When 'America for Beginners' failed to sell, both Gilbert and Russell blamed the record's sound and Corsaro's responsibility for (and with it the act's complicity in) the creation of that sound. From this point onwards, whatever he did, Jason Corsaro would make the 'wrong' record for Latin Quarter from Gilbert and Russell's point of view, while from Latin Quarter's he would make the 'right' record because it was 'their' record - this despite Skaith's misgivings about Corsaro and cocaine and Wright's general misgivings about the fitness of the existing combination of players to realise the potential of the original compositions. As it was, the fact that Gilbert and Russell had been 'proved right' by the failure of the single became a pyrrhic victory for them because Latin Quarter then re-trenched and insisted that Corsaro

produce Mick and Caroline. Ultimately, the episode was to sour already soured relations and to further polarise band, management and record company. When, a month later, the band chose Corsaro as the producer for the second album, lines of engagement were drawn with the band (and now its producer) on one side of a divide, and the band's manager and record company on the other side (though with the additional confusion that management still maintained its professional distance from the record company).

Recording Mick and Caroline.

The recording of the second Latin Quarter album got off to a bad start. After recording the basic backing tracks, six days of 'live' playing, Jason Corsaro was forced, by a family illness, to return to the USA. He did not return to Britain and the Mick and Caroline sessions, for seven weeks. In that time, whatever leeway Latin Quarter might still have enjoyed in terms of the demand (from Europe, and especially from Germany) for a follow-up to Modern Times vanished completely.

There are two periods in which to tour Europe, early Spring and the Autumn. Once recording has been completed, there then follow the different technical processes of establishing the 'master copies' for the three principal sound carriers (Compact Disc tape cassette and vinyl) from which release copies are generated. While not a lengthy business in itself what adds to the delay in 'turnaround' (from master tape to master copy) is a combination of factors which relate primarily to the work schedules of the pressing plants; any album has to join a queue and its place in that queue is further affected by the degree of readiness, or otherwise, of the album art-work. Even when the album is physically ready for release, actual release will depend on that album's place in the queue for 'take-off' (to return to the 'airport'

analogy). Particularly in Western Europe, where Latin Quarter had conducted a notably successful tour, the expectation (on the part of the relevant national 'branches' of BMG) was that Latin Quarter would return to promote their second album in the Spring of 1987. 'Clearance' had been established for this and it would have been almost unthinkable to force that clearance to be rescinded. All this meant that when Jason Corsaro returned to complete the recording of the new album, there was a strictly limited time available. All recording had to be completed by mid-January. As events transpired, Corsaro would be unavailable for further recording before even this date - he was due to begin his next recording project before that time. As a result, the over-dubbing *and* mixing process of Mick and Caroline was compressed into the three week period before Christmas, 1986 followed by a further week in the new year.

The recording of Mick and Caroline did not run to anyone's 'plan' - the act were forced to rush recording and remained continuously defensive throughout the shortened and intensified period of recording. When the songs were finally fixed onto master tape and played to the record company, they were comprehensively rejected. As Jeff Gilbert put it,

> I remember coming down ... and because everybody had said, 'Don't come down until we've finished the album' I felt that I was coming into a really alien situation and I walked in and I knew I was going to be played the album and I had to go, 'Yes, this is fantastic'. So my expectations had changed from what they would have been normally, if I'd been around and coming down every week ... I felt really alienated ... and then I went into the studio and sat down and listened to the album and everybody sort of disappeared around the building and left me... I had to go in and tell Steve what I thought of the album and I had to say, 'it doesn't particularly grab me. (Gilbert, ibid)

Gilbert's rejection of the album, contained in the innocuous sounding, 'it doesn't grab me', provoked a full scale crisis. What made the crisis more acute was Russell and Clarke's dislike of the finished product. In their case they were quick to apportion blame. As Russell put it,

> Jason Corsaro was an engineer ... He's a guy who can EQ a guitar. He isn't someone who instils a performance ... He isn't someone who rearranges a song. He isn't someone who gets an atmosphere going. He's generally someone who says, ' ...Whatever you're doing, I will make it sound great' Now, we needed something more than that. (Russell, ibid)

Russell's mixture of hostility and despair was a more open version of Gilbert's shared antipathy both to Corsaro and to his product. Gilbert informed Corsaro of the record company's disappointment and gave him the opportunity to re-mix a track to identify whether or not he could 'repair the damage'. By their criteria, (criteria which were never revealed to the band), Corsaro was then judged to have failed this task. Latin Quarter rallied around Corsaro and his mixes because, whether they really liked it or not, this was the version of the album that they had to endorse in order to retain their own autonomy and integrity.

As a result, a frantic round of re-mixes was initiated. Peter Smith who had co-produced the Sting album, The Dream of the Blue Turtles, re-mixed two tracks, 'Nomzamo' and 'Remember', but even his re-mixing of 'Nomzamo' was rejected in favour of a mix by Pete Hammond, who had co-produced Modern Times. Hammond then re-mixed everything but 'Remember', 'Negotiating With a Loaded Gun' (recorded by David Lord at a separate session earlier in the year) and 'The Men Below' which was the only Corsaro mix to be used on the album. Clearly, what made this re-mixing phase 'frantic' was the need to 'turn around' a completed album for

Northern European release in February, 1987; but what also intensified the pressure on everyone involved was the extreme polarisation that re-mixing sealed. Consequently, all of the relationships with intermediary figures that had developed in the previous four years were destroyed. Russell remained as manager for two more years but his relationship with Latin Quarter never regained its intimacy. Instead, he sought new acts and passed quickly from The Bible to The Smiths, The The, Electronic and, eventually, to Oasis. Latin Quarter, in the meantime, insisted on a 'transfer' to RCA and left behind the Rockin' Horse 'team'. Carol Douet and Martin Lascelles left and the band then divided into two further camps which saw Yona Dunsford and Greg Harewood leave some time afterwards.

Mick and Caroline performed extremely badly. Arista had no enthusiasm for the album, to the extent that Clive Davis vetoed its release in the USA and in so doing not only checked Latin Quarter's early progress in this vital market but also sent a signal to the rest of the company that the album was not worthy of promotion. The independently negotiated deals in Northern Europe held but RCA Germany and Electra in Sweden did less well with the album than they had done with Modern Times (so the recorded sound had some effect on perceptions beyond the immediate complex of intermediaries). That Latin Quarter continues to record to this day is testimony to Skaith and Wright's tenacity rather than to any sign, anywhere, that a market exists for Latin Quarter records. Effectively, Mick and Caroline 'killed off' Latin Quarter as a major pop act and it did so because all of those involved in its production interacted in ways that made the record a site of contest for a definition of 'who knows best' rather than a collaborative enterprise whose effective resolution would have benefited all parties.

Chapter Nine:

Analysis.

Introduction.

It is instructive that this study begins with a quote from a Rock journalist. As observations made in Chapter Seven reveal, my own formation as a song-writer was influenced, not just by what I learned of the music industry from the writings of rock journalists, but from the values associated with the ideology of Rock articulated in and through their work. Frith anatomises that ideology in The Sociology of Rock in his characteristically thorough and accomplished way but, as has been argued, he does not explore what it means, either for the fate of musicians or for music itself, that musicians begin their lives as consumers and, consequently, consume ideological representations of how the music industry 'works' along with the products of that industry. It would be tangential here to pursue this point any further, but, despite Cohen's work, and perhaps this work also, we still know very little about the

conceptions of 'what to expect' that aspirant musicians carry with them into the music industry, and, therefore, equally little about how these conceptions inform their work. Further, while the 'age of Rock' may be long past, and 'dance music' has been pop culturally dominant for some time now, this does not mean that a new musical-cultural sensibility amongst aspirant musicians will automatically have improved the general understanding of the demands of making hit records. One aspect of Cohen's study and, arguably, a similar aspect of the case histories in this one, demonstrates how considerable, even overwhelming, is the ignorance that aspirant pop acts have about how pop music is made as an industrial product, and of how success is contingent on successful commodification. All of this needs to be explored below, but we should now be in a position to connect the general observations about record-making and its 'double life' as 'commodity-making' made in Chapter One, together with the more specific observations of this duality made in the discussion of the literature, with the accounts of the record-making experience of the three acts presented in the case histories.

The observations made on the experience of signed pop acts in the first four chapters can be seen to form a three-tiered argument

(1). At the level of contextualisation, some general observations were made, mainly in Chapter One. These can be summarised as follows:

There are few makers of pop but many consumers. There is a paucity of information on how consumers become producers. Pop music is defined by mass sales. Only (major) record companies can achieve mass sales. Aspirant pop acts need to be contracted to major companies to at least stand a chance of achieving mass sales (and, therefore, of making truly popular music). In seven out of eight cases the combination between the pop act and the major company ends in failure.

(2). From this 'platform' a more contentious argument was developed:

All pop music begins in the human imagination but pop musicians need to work with record companies in order to make records. Record companies wield considerable power. To begin with, they decide which acts, of the huge number of contenders, will make records. More than this, a record company (through its staff) will bring to the relationship with the act its own conceptions of what it is about an act and its music that is likely to attract mass sales. The 'relationship' between act and record company is, then, doubly-problematised:

(a). Firstly, the record company will always have more power than an aspirant act in any working relationship. Such a relationship can only begin once a contract has been negotiated but, whatever that contract's stipulations, the act must always obey the schedules and budgets established for it by the record company. The act is forced into this structural subordinacy because the record company will always have more 'projects' in 'development' than it will have staff to manage those projects; in this way, aspirant acts are disadvantaged by their inability to attract, on their own terms, sustained and exclusive record company attention.

(b). Secondly, the record contract can never successfully delimit the 'spheres of competence' between act and record company. It is impossible to specify limits to areas of competence because record companies must *transform* acts and their music into commodities. To transform is to change: to 'change' implies to affect the entirety of an object, condition or relationship (or, at least, to have access to that totality in order that chosen aspects of it can be shaped, moulded or even replaced). Record companies argue their competence to 'change' on the basis of past experience, but 'past experience' is not fully represented by the vast success of hit acts - it is also defined by the failure of seven out of eight signed pop acts as an industrial average.

What this can mean, at the very least, is that a struggle for definition between all contracted parties will obtain over what it is about the act and its music that has a potential for mass sales and, further, what might yet be necessary to change about the act and its music in order to 'deliver' that potential. This struggle is, then, further complicated by the fact that not only is its focus and mode of conduct the verbal representation of musical sound but it is an anticipated future condition of that music *and of the act that makes it* that drives the struggle.

(3). The third level of argument involved a discussion of PMS literature on the operation of the music industry and of record companies and the issues that flowed from that: pop acts need record companies to *be* pop acts, but most pop acts signed to major labels fail to make records that become popular. The over-arching difficulty when dealing with this literature is that no writer has studied large-scale failure as a phenomenon in its own right; rather, the recognition that most acts fail was seen to be a by-product of studies of pop music that had widely different focuses. Despite this, it was still necessary to engage with the work of certain, key theorists for the reason that their works provide an over-view of how commodification is under-taken by record companies. Each writer was then argued to have both contributed to, and deflected from, an understanding of the roots of large-scale pop failure; its persistence and its pervasiveness. A summary of the contrasts and comparisons between these four theorists introduced Chapter Five; here we need to provide a synopsis of the points made there:

(i). All pop acts need intermediary figures to help them create mass selling records.

(ii). Acts begin relationships with intermediaries *before* they sign to major record companies.

(iii). All intermediary figures will argue their expertise in helping to create success but acts will neither be able to verify these claims to expertise nor monitor the actions carried out in their name.

(iv). All intermediaries are 'pro-active', and it is their actions (together with the pop act's responses to those actions) that make up the transformative, commodification process.

(v). In arguing their expertise as the justification for, and legitimation of, their right to initiate changes in how the act and its music should be combined and represented for public consumption, intermediaries create a 'culture of practice' which is conflictual - they are prone to argue *against* the act and *for* their own understanding of how commodification should proceed.

(vi). Intermediaries will work with each other *in the name of the act*; in this way an act never has complete access to decisions taken in its name.

In essence, this study, therefore, seeks to determine why so many signed pop acts fail to make *records* of their music that become popular. In Chapter Five, after the discussion of what could be learned from the literature about the primary features of pop commodification, the question was asked: is it the changes that acts and their material are forced to experience that leads to failure or is this outcome the result of the way in which that process of transformation is conducted? At a later stage, the existence of conflict in commodification was discussed and the additional question was asked whether failed acts experience more conflict than successful ones or are simply less able to withstand the conflict that 'comes with the territory'. If we take all of the preceding points together and 'organise' them through these questions, then the cumulative argument of the introductory chapters can be seen to distil into a proposition: if the work of intermediaries is central to pop commodification and

commodification is transformative and conflictual; and if this commodification fails seven times out of eight, then the actions of intermediaries are more likely to impact negatively rather than positively on pop acts. We need to test this proposition against the evidence presented in the case studies.

Comparing and Contrasting Respect and Roadhouse.

If, first, we work from the accounts of Respect and Roadhouse then four, key differences in their experience of making records for major labels can be identified:

1. Roadhouse stemmed from the desire of a founding member to re-create a successful recording career. This gave the act an access to the music industry (at least to one major label) that Respect did not enjoy at their outset. In this way, Roadhouse began with 'knowledge' of the industry that Respect also lacked.

2. Respect had experience of being managed by two individuals; Roadhouse had no management.

3. Respect consisted of male and female members; Roadhouse was entirely male.

4. Roadhouse was released, The Kissing Game was not.

The reason for drawing attention to the differences between Respect and Roadhouse is to try to minimise the risk of making an amalgam of their cases. All pop acts who fail will fail for their own specific combination of factors. What this study seeks to discover is whether the factors that combine, uniquely in each case, are still general or common factors in the experience of failure. Neither Respect nor Roadhouse survived commodification but they must be shown to have had more in common than this if any, more general, indication of why the large-scale failure of signed pop acts is the majority experience of popular music production. Before examining the

experience of these two acts more closely, we need to appreciate the significance of one aspect of their commonality - their physical and temporal *proximity* to each other.

Respect and Roadhouse were just two of a number of Sheffield acts that 'came and went' throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's. Neither act was known to the other, such were their stylistic differences, but they came from the same, broad cultural milieu - the world of one city's aspirant acts, and the rarefied, 'privileged' world of the one percent that sign record deals. In the same way that Cohen came across signed Liverpool acts that failed while researching The Jactars and Crikey its the Cromptons, respondents informed me of numerous Sheffield acts that had been through the process of signing major deals and then failing to 'make it'. For example, Latin Quarter performed with the Sheffield act Vitamin Z on 'Razzamatazz' - a first television appearance for both acts - but Vitamin Z disappeared without trace. Similarly, the Sheffield act Taylor-Firth and Sheridan spent a considerable period (and budget) signed to CBS without releasing a record; while the better known Comsat Angels had one small hit and then moved from label to label without progressing, in much the way that Latin Quarter did. Similarly, the local Sheffield newspaper, 'The Star' reported a number of notable Sheffield 'failures' in the supplement referred to in Chapter Seven. The terms in which the root-cause of that failure was discussed need to be returned to, below; the point here is that any one of this much wider number of acts could also have formed case histories in this study - once the search for failed major signings began, more and more of them turned up. Respect and Roadhouse were not selected because they were extreme examples, but because they were examples of a general phenomenon. Thus, despite the differences in their experience, there is much that they have in common.

Respect.

Where Respect is concerned, the 'route' from 'the bedroom' to the ante-room of 'mass consciousness' was described entirely in terms of the momentum created by their interactions with intermediary figures. Josie Robson described and implied how much the musical 'projects' initiated by Malcolm Walmsley were very much driven by his own creative vision. Sons and Lovers was 'a very stylised package' for which Walmsley 'did all the writing'; Skin was a nine-piece band but again Walmsley did all the writing; Respect was a 'far from equal' writing partnership. On this basis, she is 'astonished' when Walmsley agrees with Chris Cox's judgement of the early Respect material and agrees to a collaboration with a producer. This is despite her recognition that the act, itself, recognised that it suffered limitations - 'we could do very little with (songs)' once they had been demoed.

What is interesting in this last observation, above, is the implication that the 'very little' more that Respect could do with its material (and with itself) was *strategic* rather than musical. We will need to explore 'strategy' as an intrinsic factor in the determination to progress; here we can observe that, at base, Respect could not progress because (like so many aspirant acts) they lacked contact with (major) record companies. Once a sympathetic individual appeared who at least had music industry contacts, they reacted to him in ways that bore on the core of their existence as a pop act - from the way they hoped to realise their music as a recorded product, to the way they appeared as people (see below). Further, once they accepted that outsiders might have an input (an unspecified and unqualified input) they can then be seen to have been led from the actions of one intermediary figure to the actions of another - from Cox to Levene; from accepting Levene's potential role to agreeing to Heaton's

initiative; from accepting Heaton's suggestion for management to accepting, seemingly entirely, that manager's judgement of them and strategy for them, to the exclusion of any other course of action; and, finally, on the manager's advice and insistence, to a reliance on a powerful, but lone, figure in the record company.

The 'story' of Respect then becomes one, not so much of exploitation and manipulation by 'external' forces, but of continuous pragmatism as they react to the consequences of interactions that they 'allowed' rather than consciously initiated. These 'interactions' developed (through) a sequence of encounters that culminated in the act signing a record contract and, more importantly, allying itself with a major record company, on terms that it was neither clear about nor happy with. The fate of Respect was not so much in the hands of others; rather, it remained in the hands of the act but only in as much as the act could understand what was happening to it and what was demanded of it, and could respond as effectively as possible to these expectations and demands. At each encounter, they trusted in intermediary figures whose fundamental message was always 'we know best'. This does not mean that Respect was either a puppet or a victim of these intermediaries, but it does suggest how intractable the logic, and the momentum, of these kinds of inter-relationships can become.

In the above way - and remembering Negus's views on 'artist development' - we can see how susceptible a pop act can be to the influence of a (quite arbitrary) collection of 'outsiders', of go-betweens between the actuality of Respect and their ambition of major success ('all those dreams started again'). All three members had had almost a decade's experience of local music-making before Chris Cox's arrival in their midst. Cox was simply the owner of a local artists' supply shop who happened to be a partner in a local studio and had, consequently, spent some time with an up-

and-coming record producer as a result. Seemingly, Cox's ability to talk about Respect's music with enthusiasm, coupled with a little ready cash and the promise of some studio time, was sufficient to register an immediate impact on an act that, by its own admission, was 'very much enclosed within ourselves'. Despite eventually (and quite quickly) letting them down, his connection to a producer with a small but growing national reputation initiated the chain of events described above; where this takes on a kind of 'snowball' of associations that witnesses the three members of the act attempting to 'hold onto' their music as events gain momentum and, crucially, direction around them.

Robson's description of life on Chrysalis is testimony to how little connection Respect had with decisions made about them - why, for example, did it take five months to complete the record contract, and why was there a five month delay between the completion of the album and its release? Where 'artist development' is concerned, they had already taken the advice of a complete stranger who had told them 'there is so much further you could go with this' and they then listened to another stranger who told them that their songs were 'top ten' but that they were not 'there yet'. Respect then spent a considerable period on self-development which, when it came to the developmental role taken by the record company, proved to be a source of considerable friction - there were 'a lot of wrangles'. Negus describes how acts can 'de-motivate' a record company through negative or hostile attitudes. In Respect's case, it was their manager who exhibited the aggression; their own reluctance to comply with artist development was a consequence not just of their trust in their manager and their faith in their own, extensive research into 'style, presence and attitude' but also because they wanted to resist sexist marketing practices - they remained faithful to their own understanding of Respect as a musical

entity, while what Chrysalis wanted was a saleable product. Although she has no evidence, the implication of Robson's remarks are that these conflicts, when coupled with the manager's aggression, soured relations with the label long before they were dropped.

The circumstances of Respect's being dropped by Chrysalis are graphic, not to say savage, and the vignette of seeing a skip full of unreleased, expensively produced CD's is Hollywoodesque. Unfortunately, it is also true. Ultimately, Respect was finally undone by the act's dependence, through their manager, on a single figure in the company - managing director, Peter Robinson. Yet nowhere in her account does Robson discuss Respect's relationship with Robinson, nor is there evidence that Stephens, the manager, attempted to draw the attention of any other company to the act or, once signed, to create relationships with anyone other than Robinson inside Chrysalis. Essentially, the chance meeting with producer Chris Heaton created a 'halo effect' around his advice, and the 'bullish' personality of a comparatively successful manager with an industry background was enough to convince Respect that they were in 'safe hands'. The determination to concentrate on music-making (and a willingness to work on 'style') obviated any attempt to initiate contingency planning or to create a critical distance between the act and intermediaries, in general. This meant, fatally, that Respect was entirely in hands that were *unsafe*. On this basis, 'failure' (and for Respect failure was total - no album was released) was a result of their complete dependence on a combination of intermediaries who, when one was removed from the equation, left them exposed to the hostility of the company. In Respect's case, this was an hostility they had helped create but had never truly earned. In Negus's terms, it is not enough that an act 'is nice to people', the 'artist development' team *does* need to be motivated but they can be demotivated by forces other than the act.

Roadhouse.

Given Respect's experience, it would be fair to assume, for the reasons outlined previously, that Roadhouse was much better placed - no immediate distractions from individuals not connected with the original band members and one member's considerable experience of the music industry to draw from. But Roadhouse failed and, again, failed quite comprehensively - although an album was released, the extent to which Roadhouse was their work is debatable, given that the master tapes were taken away from them and re-mixed by engineers employed directly by Phonogram. Even if we accept that Roadhouse was their album, the failure of the act was not entirely due to their own actions. Again, the founder members concentrated on music to the exclusion of all other considerations. Where matters of organisation were concerned, Richard Day felt the *need* for an intermediary between the company and the band ('for the set-up that we were you needed somebody almost like a school master'); but rather than prove a conclusive argument for a manager, as such, what this shows is how powerful companies can be in the absence of a manager - again a point that Negus does not consider.

In the case of Roadhouse, the company (represented almost solely by Dave Bates) had almost autocratic control over their affairs. Because he trusted in the experience of Pete Willis, Richard Day assumed that how things were, were how things should be. He had no previous experience with which to compare his circumstances; all he had was what he had 'learned' from consuming Heavy Rock. Day seemed genuinely bewildered when recounting many of the demands that Phonogram managing director Dave Bates made of Roadhouse, but whether his analysis of them, and of the experience in general, is accurate or not is not the issue. Rather, the issue would seem to be that he and Willis made an enormous investment

of time and emotion in creating 'East West'. While it was no fault of Phonogram's that the name became unusable, the fact that, far from providing a nurturing environment that would have seen the musicians through the disappointment of the name change (which, as Day shows convincingly, was central to their own sense of self-identity as a distinct act - a key feature of artist development) they treated Roadhouse in an unsympathetic way. It is for us to make sense of Richard Day's making sense of his experience of being signed to a major label, but none of the orderly and solicitous sequentiality depicted by Negus seems apparent in his case. Again, contracts took time to sign, and, once signed, the actual process of record-making became extremely fraught, despite the fact that most of the material had been recorded before the contract was signed and the identity of the band (if not its personnel) was established in the mind, and the practice, of the principals.

If we use time-scale as one way of taking a cross section through the Roadhouse experience, then, apparently, Phonogram had no particular deadline to work towards in their case (Day comments on the lack of activity beyond recording, Josie Robson of Respect identified wrangles around exactly the issues of photography and video making, all evidence of preparation for release). But, once their 'flight' was called, the act needed to respond. Again, they concentrated their efforts on completing their record, but this had already been compromised by the imposition of Chris Sheldon as mixer (who, ironically, chose Swanyard as his studio of choice). When Sheldon's mixes were rejected by Phonogram, the true effect of Bates' demand for an 'Executive Producer' credit became apparent - he took 'executive action' and took charge of the master tapes that, legally, Phonogram owned. The tapes were re-mixed and the album sequenced without Roadhouse's involvement. The act was left to promote an album that, in every way, demanded to

be released but which was neither supported by the company nor by the act itself. Failure in this case became a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The seeds of the collapse of Roadhouse can be argued to have been present in the combination of Pete Willis's lack of expertise in music business practices (despite his membership of Def Leppard) and, again, the act's concentration on music and style in the absence of any attempt even to set up a buffer between them and the company. If companies behaved as Negus's informants portrayed them - reasonably, with the act's interests always melded with those of the company - then there would be no need for a (managerial) 'buffer'. In this account, clearly there was. To try to make the case *for* the company's attitude (for the autocracy of Dave Bates) then, perhaps the *sound* which Roadhouse delivered disappointed him - but this does not explain his reported behaviour in the lengthy period between signing and the completion of the record. Equally, Roadhouse's problems would not necessarily have been solved by a 'school master', they would simply have been different problems. As the Respect case should indicate, new intermediaries encourage new trajectories, and acts are so inward looking that they imagine the only trajectory to be the one that takes them to success.

Further Observations on Method.

(1). The Respondents.

Before discussing how the evidence of the first two case studies connects with the proposition which concluded the previous section (that the actions of intermediaries are more likely to impact negatively than positively on pop acts), it is necessary to discuss this evidence as an 'outcome of method' for the bearing the methods employed in organising and researching this study have for any conclusions

it might generate. My position as researcher was explored in Chapter Five. Because of the unusual nature of that position, the need was argued for the promotion of 'active reading' of this text through the agency of 'reflexivity'. Even from the brief summation of the 'unravelling' of Respect and Roadhouse once they left their respective 'bedrooms', the impact of intermediaries on their fortunes is quite stark but this does not 'prove' anything, as such; rather, the experience of these two acts, together with that of Latin Quarter, needs to be theorised rather than simply 'announced' before any degree of 'proof' can be derived from these accounts. In order that these 'accounts' or narratives be opened to theory, the method of their construction needs to be examined.

My coming to know Richard Day and Josie Robson was discussed in the introduction to Chapter Seven. The further point which needs to be made here is that in no sense did either of these two respondents structure their accounts to satisfy any announced purpose of mine. Rather, I encouraged them to 'tell me what happened'. Clearly, in my responses to their points - whether consciously, in the form of questions, or unconsciously, in the form of non-verbal behaviour - I may have helped develop aspects of their 'telling' but what it is vital to recognise in both instances is that the individuals concerned were 'hearing' their story for the first time. On this basis, it was their similar enthusiasm to recount the events of the formation and failure of their respective acts that propelled (and shaped) the narrative. To understand why this was the case we need to reflect on the nature of 'failure' itself.

When Day and Robson agreed to discuss their experiences with me I was aware that I was privileged to hear 'what happened' to Respect and Roadhouse - for the fundamental reason that most people like to keep their failures hidden. Conversely, there is no ready-made audience for musicians who have been through traumatic

episodes. The 'myth' of pop is that of almost unbounded success. There *is* a limited literature of failure in the business of making recorded music (cf Simon Garfield's Expensive Habits, 1986) and part of the show business lore that pop ideology has re-invented for itself remains that 'stars' are consumed by success; as John Lahr puts it,

> Each newly minted "superstar" is a reminder of the conspicuous waste of talent - the dark side of American abundance - where, exploited and exhausted by the voracious media, careers are "gloriously" made and "spectacularly" lost. The public relishes each fall of a star as a sacrifice that brings renewed fertility in the shape of someone yet richer and more glamorous. (Lahr, 1984, p.223)

But this is not a literature of aspirants who 'fail to make it'. The colloquial understanding of this type of failure is represented effectively in an 'explanation' for the failure of 'promising' local acts offered by the Sheffield 'Star'

> Of course not everyone has their dream realised and the journey along the road to fame and fortune often ends in a flat tyre on the pop 'n' roll hard shoulder. While Sheffield has had its fair share of success stories, for every star there are dozens who fall by the wayside ... Put it down to natural selection or just dashed bad luck. (Oi, 3, 1997 p.4)

The colloquial understanding of 'Natural Selection' as 'only the strong survive' is challenged by the more likely explanation for the survival of species in their ability to adapt. Even so, the notion of 'toughness' is an attractive one and I had similar recourse to this 'explanation', in chapter one, with regard to what acts are likely to attract A&R attention. But 'natural selection' suggests an *external* determination for the fate of a pop act - fortuitously they 'had what it takes to survive'; and 'fortune' is then offered as the complementary 'explanation' - the winners have 'good luck', the losers have 'bad luck'. Where the failure of pop acts is concerned the reality of failure can already be seen to be far removed from these colloquial explanations - but when

it comes to discussing such episodes, musicians find themselves in a double-bind: firstly, it is difficult to piece together exactly what did happen to cause the collapse because musicians tend to have limited access to decisions made about them; and, secondly, whether a musician wants to discuss their story or not, there is unlikely to be a ready-made audience for the story - to put it crudely, everyone loves a 'winner' and, by the same token, no-one wants to hear a 'hard luck' story.

(2). Language and Concepts.

Viewed particularly from the last point above, the connection between my involvement in Latin Quarter and the motivation behind this study should be quite apparent, but before we can examine the 'evidence' of the Latin Quarter case history in any more detail (and, through this, make some final remarks on the connections between commodification and the large-scale failure of pop acts) we need to take note of a further dimension of the method of analysis of the case histories of Respect and Roadhouse.

The point was made in Chapter One, and then explored in much greater detail in Chapter Five, that I cannot 'cleanse' myself, methodologically, of my experience of making records. The further point was made that, inevitably, the Latin Quarter case history would differ qualitatively as well as quantitatively from those of Respect and Roadhouse. Again, not only is there a danger of making an amalgam of these three case histories, there is a greater danger of obliterating the qualitative differences between them. One way of reconciling the difference in their quality, and of avoiding an uncritical amalgamation of distinct experiences, is to consider what light the *shaping* of the three accounts can cast on the central concern of this study.

To 'shape' an account is to construct a narrative. To 'construct' involves a process of selection, in this case, of words and phrases, to make diverse reports of experience cohere. In attempting to make a coherent account of what 'happened' to Respect and Roadhouse I make use of a number of key terms, terms that recur throughout this study: 'momentum', 'dynamic', 'logic', 'trajectory', 'strategy' and, fundamentally, 'process'. Once more, as the discussion in Chapter Five conveyed, I first analysed my experience of major label failure through what I identified as a counter-opposition between 'process' and 'orthodoxy'. A process can be understood as a series of actions that are made towards the creation of an object or the attainment of a goal - towards a *changed* state. A chemical process, for example, changes its constituents, through their reaction on each other, to make a new compound of some kind. The danger of using scientific metaphors is that their are redolent of determinism, they are 'non-human'; further, unlike in life, identical reactions will continuously recur under the same conditions. It is not my intention to represent the record-making/pop-commodity-making 'process' as something either mechanically repetitive or pre-determined; despite this, I can only report that, after the making and subsequent failure of Mick and Caroline I felt that I had been through a process that had produced its own result. I then sought explanation for this sensation, and explication of this process, in PMS literature and found nothing that was immediately satisfactory. I then termed those works, collectively, as an 'orthodoxy' that either misrepresented, or failed entirely to connect with, the 'process' I had experienced and, so, mounted this study.

The terms identified and listed above are all ones concerned either with movement - its operation (dynamic), direction (trajectory) force (momentum, logic) - or with the attempt to plan or guide movement (strategy). In the discussion of

Respect and Roadhouse, I interpret the observations made, separately, by Day and by Robson in and through these terms, but while the terms are mine, the objects and relationships they describe are those of the respondents. Both Day and Robson clearly experienced processes - they changed demos into recordings; their changed their local status from aspirant act to signed act; they changed the focus of their activities from Sheffield to London, and much more. Further, the 'movement' involved in the process they became caught up in changed both acts - it finished them - and, in both cases, the co-principals within the act can be seen to be, not so much the victims of events they had no control over, but, rather, casualties of their own lack of preparation for the certainty that 'events', and changing, transformative events, would take place in the name of Respect, Roadhouse and their musics.

It is the above sense of an individual's awareness that 'change' has begun to occur, accompanied by a nagging, almost paralysing inability to identify its points of origin and growth and respond to them, that connects so forcefully with my own experience in Latin Quarter. As an act, Latin Quarter experienced changes, entire transformations, on all fronts. For example, the relationship between Steve Skaith and myself was changed - not only did we have to define why this 'Latin Quarter' existed in the way that it did, but we also had to define a business relationship between each other and between each other and the rest of the act because it is song-writers who earn most money in a pop act. Latin Quarter needed also to behave as a conscious, collective entity in its dealings both with its manager, who had his own agenda for the act, and with the record company, who also had their agenda for Latin Quarter. In the midst of this, I could not rely on the intimacy and support of my friendship with Marcus Russell because that friendship had been changed by the new roles we had taken on. More subtly, but no less profoundly, our very manner of

speech in attempting to articulate our concerns, and to gain some control over events, was changed by the need to adopt a language common to all three component parts of the process of making Mick and Caroline - the act and its members (singly and in combination); the manager and his employees; and the record company and its staff.

Clearly, there are parallels between Latin Quarter's experience and that of Respect and Roadhouse. In keeping with the research position explored in Chapter Five, the only way of comparing and contrasting their experiences, and of examining the conclusions drawn from a study of the literature in relationship to them, is to proceed in the manner identified above: what Respect, Roadhouse and Latin Quarter have in common in the immediate term is that I have constructed their stories. My construction has been led by assumptions generated through the experience of making records. Those assumptions are revealed through language choices and through the concepts these inform and help express. The qualitative differences between the case histories cannot be erased by this method, but they can be *equalised* by making as open as possible the motivation behind the selection of terms through which those experiences are discussed and, therefore, represented. Before beginning this process, some further, preliminary remarks are required.

Comparing and Contrasting Respect and Roadhouse with Latin Quarter.

(1). Preliminary Observations.

The recognition that seven out of eight signed acts fail was made through studying PMS literature, but as we already know, that literature does not concentrate on large-scale failure as a phenomenon in its own right. My primary reason for confining my discussion of the literature to texts which focus explicitly on how popular music is made as an industrial product is contingent on this - I have not

considered other forms of cultural production because, even within PMS literature, the experience of signed pop acts needs, largely, to be deduced from wider studies; to explore studies of a different provenance again would seem, at the least, a distraction. Even so, the discussion of PMS literature centres on the role and practice of intermediary figures and institutions. This is the 'familiar' territory of mediation, of, in fact, media studies. Mediation is an inescapable fact of cultural production; crudely, it brings 'production' (in the sense of industrial organisation) to the generation of cultural artefacts (understood, in this sense of 'culture', as products of the imagination). Mediation, then, is not exceptional, but an argument about its distinctiveness within the music industry has constantly 'broken the surface' of this study.

In the first chapter the argument was advanced that the distinctiveness of record-making as commodity production derives from the need of all parties to discuss not only music, but music in a 'future state'. To an extent, this is an over-generalisation - no-one sees a film or a TV Soap or can read a newspaper until each of those artefacts has been edited. Despite this, images on a screen and words on a page have a kind of tangibility that notes in the air lack. Mediation in popular music takes place almost entirely through *assertion*, and all three parties to the commodification of a pop act - the record company, the act's management, and the act itself - come from different directions to this business of making assertions of how music sounds now, and how it, and the act that makes it, will be received by the audience at some future point. It is the need to face up to, and survive, this distinctive condition of mediation in popular music-making that Respect, Roadhouse and Latin Quarter have, or had, in common (and had in common with *all* pop acts). Further, this 'condition' is one that is structured by conflict and the separate fates of the three

acts are all marked by the experience of considerable conflict. Before examining these experiences in any greater detail we need to consider this notion of 'structural conflict' more closely.

We have seen that Negus draws attention to conflict within pop commodification - there are conflicts between different record company departments and there can be conflicts between acts and record companies over issues of 'artist development'. Arguably, all conflicts that acts experience can be related to 'artist development' but for more fundamental reasons than those identified by Negus. We have already seen that power is inequally distributed in commodification - acts cannot dictate terms to record companies whatever their contracts stipulate, because record companies have complete control over their resources and, ultimately, acts depend on the effective deployment of those resources in their own cause if they are to make progress in the market place. But conflict in popular music production can be shown to be more fundamental, more 'structural' even than this.

Structural conflict in record-making exists in and through the differences in perspective, ambition and definition of the primary contributing parties to pop commodification. If we deal with each of these 'parties' in turn, then the act can be argued to hold a conception of itself as, predominantly, a musical entity. On this basis, its perspective on record-making will centre on the translation of its music into a recorded form - an aspirant act is 'expert' in its own music-making but not in record-making. Managers, whether experienced or not, are not music-makers, their expertise lies in 'producing' the act, in the fundamental, but non-musical, sense of organising it as an entity that must fulfil a recording contract - a contract that the manager will have been instrumental in negotiating and securing. In this loose, but important, sense, the manager's expertise lies in record-making. Finally, the record

company's expertise is an over-arching one - record company personnel are not music-makers and neither are they record-makers, as such; rather, their expertise lies in commodity-making. In this very broad way, three entities combine from three perspectives with a single goal in mind, not a 'good' record (imprecise though this is) but a *successful* one. Almost inevitably, definitions of what a 'successful' record will consist of, and how this might be brought about, will differ not just from 'party' to 'party', but often within the territory of each party. Once we accept that the record-making relationship is structurally conflictual in this most fundamental way of all, then we are better placed not just to understand the experiences of the acts in the case histories (and, arguably, pop acts in general), but also to begin to *theorise* those experiences.

(2). The Detail.

To have arrived at a point where a comparison between the experiences of Respect, Roadhouse and Latin Quarter is feasible, we have needed to identify methodological 'conditions' for that comparison. The selection of terms through which the experiences of the three acts were represented in the case histories, and, subsequently, in the previous discussion of Respect and Roadhouse in this chapter, was derived from a combination of sources already referred to: my experience of making records, the action of my experience on my engagement with PMS texts that discuss pop commodification, and the identification, through this process, of key aspects of commodification and key weaknesses in their general representation - notably those associated with mediation. We can now compare and contrast the experiences of Respect and Roadhouse with those of Latin Quarter through reference to the common concepts that have been used to construct their case histories - on the

basis that these concepts have been informed, in a equivalent way, by the use of terms connected with my own process of reflection on the experience of making records, to describe and analyse the objects and relationships discussed with respondents.

(i). The Acts and Music-making.

At one point, in Chapter Seven, I contrast Respect and Roadhouse with Latin Quarter on the basis that Latin Quarter was formed to play music that was already written. In one sense, this observation is misleading - both Respect and Roadhouse were signed *ahead* of the formation of a live act; they were signed on the strength of their demo tapes. The consequences of this difference in origin between the acts is quite profound. Latin Quarter, the act, was formed at the urging, mainly, of Marcus Russell (Sean Clarke was always the secondary partner in Ignition management). This introduced two conditions to the Latin Quarter experience that the other two acts did not have to endure. Firstly, Russell was able to impose his vision of a 'live act' on Skaith and myself; or, rather, his determination to see such an act established created a field of conflict between Ignition and myself, Skaith and Wright that grew relentlessly throughout our time together. Secondly, the creation of 'Latin Quarter' introduced five strangers into the already problematic set of relations that had been initiated by Russell's search for a 'deal' for the songs I played him.

There has been no place, thus far, in this study for the exploration of a pop act (when this consists of more than one person) as a dynamic field in its own right. This will be discussed below, but it is clear that the song-writing principals in Respect and

Roadhouse only had each other to contend with. Those sets of principals were extremely intimate with each other but Skaith and I lived in two separate cities, and the chance that the eight people who came to comprise Latin Quarter would form the kind of intimacy with each other that at least promised resilience in the face of adversity was slim, indeed. The fact that the recruitment of the 'players' had a decisive effect on the music that record companies heard was discussed in Chapter Seven but, further, we need also to consider that the 'look' and the 'story' of Latin Quarter were changed irrevocably by the recruitment of playing members ahead of any deal. What caused Jeff Gilbert to make Latin Quarter his first signing was the combination of 'look' and music and this opened up another site of tension and conflict - Latin Quarter could never have become the act he hoped it would be, for the reason that Skaith and I would continue to write material, and behave from precepts, that would always conflict with 'the new Fleetwood Mac' dream. At the same time, while the other members of Latin Quarter would be allowed no access to song-writing decisions and, therefore, were not truly equal members of the act (they were 'players' rather than 'band members') their appearance, and the stories that could be told about them as people, would still dominate how the act would be 'constructed' for public consumption. This point will be developed shortly, here it reinforces the recognition that where Latin Quarter was concerned, 'artist development' was constitutionally conflictual.

(ii). The Acts and their Management.

The fact that Roadhouse was not managed was discussed earlier. Again, their *lack* of management proved a source of weakness for them because it allowed a known record company autocrat free reign over them. In the cases of Respect and

Latin Quarter, there are remarkable similarities in their progress to, and fortunes at, their respective record companies. If Respect's progress was described by sequential exchange through a chain of intermediaries then so was Latin Quarter's. The crucial difference between the two cases is that Russell was a friend of mine (and an acquaintance of Skaith's through their shared membership of the same political organisation). Jack Stephens' involvement with Respect was 'third-hand', and therefore less likely to be confused by the emotional and political ties between Russell, Skaith and myself. These differences proved to be differential sources of weakness - Respect had only Stephens' 'word' and his 'track record' to trust; I trusted Russell because of my intimacy with him, but what Russell rapidly became was a figure like Jack Stephens, someone able to survive on their wits in the music industry.

If we consider this last point more closely, we need to appreciate 'who' managers are and where they come from. As we saw in the discussions of Frith and Negus, both these theorists refer to the role and practice of management and both were criticised for the inadequacy of their treatment of this particular pop variable. 'Artist development' *has* to begin with the earliest decision of individuals that they want to play music together. As we have seen, pop is music that is sold in great quantities and is sold as a commodity that is *more* than music. Negus is right to stress the importance of style and identity in the pop 'equation'; the identity ('look' and 'story') of the performer is an intrinsic part of why a major record company feels willing to invest the capital in acts to make records. New pop acts have to begin as consumers of pop music. It can be argued that, when they first begin to play together and, especially, when they begin to write original material, the members of nascent pop acts reproduce the *conditions* of the experience they have consumed (music that

has been commodified as a total of the act, its look and its story). In this way, nascent pop acts create more than music, they create themselves as a pop act in this comprehensive and thorough way: they 're-invent' themselves as 'pop-stars-in-waiting' - artist development begins at home.

Once 'created', in the manner described above, nascent, or, by now, aspirant pop acts find it impossible to progress their own efforts at artist development; they cannot access record companies without a go-between. These 'go-betweens' are managers and they, too, will be individuals who have been inspired by their consumption of pop to become involved in the music industry. Similarly, they, too, will have their own developmental conceptions of 'what it takes' to become successful. In Respect's case, Stephens had already enjoyed success with Scarlett Fantastic. Russell had had no success, but he developed very quickly into someone who felt confident that he knew how success could be achieved, arguably because the kinds of tasks that managers need to undertake gives them an 'education' in the ways, in the *culture*, of the music industry that acts do not experience.

In Chapter Three, Frith was criticised for painting an overly-sanguine picture of the pop manager; 'a manager does everything for his artiste but get up there and sing' (Tony Hatch, quoted without qualification). What this leaves out is not just those unanswered questions discussed in that chapter, but also the related implications of the objective, structural position of the manager in relationship to the act. For example, a manager *may* be an altruist but, whatever his or her aims in managing a particular act, these individuals, unless they are completely incompetent, cannot avoid accumulating a monopoly of information about the act's position in relation to *all* outside agencies. This, in turn, means that they can directly access a variety of sources of information and understanding that are operationally closed to

acts (discussions with record company personnel at all levels and in a range of countries; discussions with every one from fly-posters to record producers, and so on). The tempo of this accumulation of information (which becomes 'knowledge' through its practical application, successful or otherwise) quickens dramatically after the act signs to a record label and, even more so, after the record is released and promoted. This 'monopoly' position may not have been deliberately pursued - and it might not be exploited - but power 'comes with the job' and the temptation to abuse it must be persistent and, when acts become 'troublesome', difficult to resist

The power referred to above is, at base, the manager's 'orienting practice' (see Negus) or 'working theory' (Garnham, in Negus, 1992) and it develops almost entirely through the clear need for managers to 'learn the lie of the land' - mainly of the 'land' of the record company; but also those of publishers, publicists, promoters, agents, and so on. Again, almost inevitably, given the precarious nature of the music industry on a local, immediate level, the vast bulk of these people will display all the characteristic intensity of music industry personnel. What a manager does is to soak up this the prerogatives of this collective, adrenaline-fuelled 'culture of practice' and learn how to live with it and how to draw on its power when required; or, at least, if they fail to, they fail as managers. At its worst, this 'working theory' can be used by managers to raise 'smoke screens' around their decision-making where, ultimately, it is the act that will bear the penalties of any bad deals made in its name. Under the constant pressure of recording and promotional schedules, the energy and morale of an act can quickly be drained if they go on registering the effects of bad decisions without locating their source (because of smoke-screening); all of this frustration and demoralisation, not unreasonably, can be argued to erode creativity and, in turn, to

have a negative effect on relations with the record company who, in turn, will be increasingly less willing to work hard for surly and bad-tempered acts.

The above, then, encapsulates the experience of Respect and of Latin Quarter with regard to management, but rather than apportion 'blame' it is vital to see how the in-built *structural* disadvantage of the act is exacerbated when the act, itself, does not question the structural role of the manager. In Respect's case they appear simply to have trusted Stephens; in Latin Quarter's case, the act challenged Russell only on his competence to decide their music, not their fates. The making of Mick and Caroline was permeated with rows and conflict. By his own admission 'something changed' in Russell (after Latin Quarter rejected Stewart Levine and took on Darren Abraham as drummer). He began to manage The Bible and looked to further expand and diversify the activities of Ignition Management. In sum, Russell took the decision to survive as a manager rather than survive as the manager of Latin Quarter. He took no responsibility for the impact of his wrong decisions with regard to the act up to that point - this much is clear from his comments in Hewitt's book on Oasis:

> (Latin Quarter) self-destructed. It sounds a bit dramatic but I think everyone gets bugged by the level of success they have or haven't got. And I was unable to give them that confidence in that time. (Hewitt, 1997, p.184)

This, at the very least, is disingenuous - Latin Quarter with Marcus Russell at the helm 'self-destructed'. This is not to criticise Russell's commitment - he worked tremendously hard throughout his time as manager - but the fact remains that he was determined to assert his competence at all times, in the face of all eventualities. In the same way, Jack Stephens 'led the way' with Respect. To reiterate one of Josie Robson's observations from Chapter Six:

> He was so aggressive all the time, "I'm not having this for my band", and so on .... We were unhappy about a lot of things, we were quite a Bolshie band - about the singles, the sleeves. I was very concerned that I didn't want to be marketed as a woman ... we were a group, a band, we each had our role to play ... and Jack absolutely supported us in all of that. He was important but I wonder whether we were right. (Robson interview, ibid)

This quote, complete with its air of bewilderment, is one of many that represents Stephens' own commitment to his singular understanding of how to create a hit act. Richard Day, on the other hand, lamented the lack of such a figure, but only because his, and Roadhouse's, experience of life with a major record company was so destructive.

(iii). The Acts and their Record Companies.

It might be anticipated that, in a consideration of how pop acts experience mediation, the relationship between the acts and their record companies would demand the most detailed attention of all, for the reason that, in practice, record companies are the primary media institutions that acts encounter. This is the unstated but clear thrust of Negus's work, but the whole tenor of the analysis thus far has been to argue not only that 'artist development' begins long before pop acts arrive at record companies but also that - and this is still to be demonstrated - the act's 'pre-history' of artist development decisively conditions its experience of the record companies own efforts in this direction.

It has already been argued that record companies are competent in commodity-making - although not as competent as everyone imagines them to be, given the extremely high failure rate amongst signed acts. Negus is our best guide to the internal regimes of record companies, but the weaknesses in his representation of

them have already been detailed. In the light of the material furnished through the case studies we can reinforce those criticisms. For example, Roadhouse have already been shown to have undergone an experience that was anything but 'nurturing'. At the same time, Jeff Gilbert revealed (but not when it might have made a difference to Latin Quarter) that many of Arista's employees 'did not like' the act - there was no active de-motivation, here, simply an 'unearned' antipathy. Josie Robson's account of Chrysalis is closest to Negus's version of record company practice - we can recognise the ways in which an ostensibly supportive 'artist development' team may have become de-motivated - but, again, not by the act but by the act's manager.

Beyond these remarks, it is worth indicating how not one of the three acts had any knowledge of the internal 'health' of the record companies they joined (this was lack was particularly damaging in the case of Latin Quarter). Equally, all three acts were dependent on single individuals to support them in their relationship with 'artist development' as a whole. As a consequence, Roadhouse was at the mercy of Dave Bates; Respect's tenure at Chrysalis ended immediately Peter Robinson was sacked; and Latin Quarter's fortunes rose and fell with Jeff Gilbert's fluctuating influence inside a highly unstable Arista. Beyond this, the case histories actually tell us very little about the acts' relationships with their respective record companies - but, conversely, this tells us a great deal about how the commodification process works.

The members of Respect, Roadhouse and Latin Quarter interviewed for this research all had little to say about their relationships with the record companies to which they signed, because they enjoyed very little access to the decisions made about them by those companies. Again, the most graphic example of the high degree of ignorance of the decision-making process suffered by pop acts is that of Respect. So insecure was their tenure at Chrysalis that, even with a completed album whose

review copies had already gone to press, the regime which took over following the sacking of Peter Robinson was able to gauge the staff's antipathy to them so rapidly that the decision to drop Respect was taken immediately. Similarly, Roadhouse developed no understanding of Phonogram's 'game-plan' for them, and they had so little purchase on the company that the tapes of their album could be taken to an unknown studio and re-mixed by an engineer they never met. Viewed against this extreme background, Latin Quarter's experience was the least fraught, yet, as Marcus Russell put it, 'there was a lot of shit going on .. that you don't even know about' (Russell interview, ibid). We need to note the present tense here, Russell still had not given me the whole story seven years after Mick and Caroline had contributed decisively to the demise of Latin Quarter.

If Negus can be criticised for making one aspect of the commodification process stand for its entirety, the weakness of the method employed above should be equally apparent. All of the above remarks should indicate how dynamic is the process of commodification; or, more accurately, commodification should be conceived of as a process that is defined by a combined dynamism, a continuous cross-cutting of dynamics between and within the constituent parties to that commodification. Rather than try to learn about these experiences by examining each in isolation from each other, we should attempt to envisage, and analyse, record-making and the commodification that both organises and contextualises it, holistically. In attempting a dynamic, holistic account of the pop act's experience of the major label we need to look outside PMS literature but to Organisation Theory rather than to Media theory, as such.

Organisation Theory and Popular Music.

(1). Theoretical Context.

The role, for this research, of the study of organisations as a point of merger between method and theory was introduced in Chapter Five, but the implication that organisational concepts would need to be drawn on to explain what happens in pop commodification - and why what happens there so often results in failure - has been present in the conceptual vocabulary of this study since its beginning. Again, this vocabulary derives from the aspects of a personal 'history' recounted previously - my own need to understand what had 'happened' in the making of Mick and Caroline and the fact that PMS literature did not immediately clarify my experience of making records. As I intimated in Chapter Five, reading organisational theory gave a shape to my experience that PMS literature did not. It gave 'shape' to experience because of the concepts I encountered in that particular literature - most notably those associated with Silverman's 'Social Action Theory' or 'Action Frame of Reference' (Silverman, 1970), the subsequent genesis of his work, and of responses to it, within the broader field of Organisation Theory (OT), itself.

Thompson and McHugh (1995) provide a useful overview of recent developments in OT. Their identification of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) work on 'paradigm diversity' in OT as a watershed in the development of the discipline is echoed in further texts edited by Hassard and Pym (1990) and Hassard and Parker (1993 and 1994). The significance of Burrell and Morgan's work was that it attempted to bring order to a branch of sociology, industrial sociology, that had experienced, with the social sciences as a whole, the upheavals of the profound period of social questioning associated with the 1960's. Industrial Sociology had long been dominated by the US school of 'Functionalism' or 'Systems Theory' (Hirsch's

work is interesting in this respect because his Functionalist account of how the record industry worked was produced in what was rapidly to become the twilight of Functionalism, in general). Even so, Systems Theory 'clung on' in industrial sociology longer than in other areas - perhaps because a concern with the functioning (and, therefore, with improving the efficiency of) organisations had proved so important in the US economy, the economy that had pioneered 'scientific management' and the Fordist assembly line. This US commitment to the power of 'managerialism' (supported by its effective 'abolition' of militant trade unionism which allowed managers a far greater 'scope' to change working practices than they enjoyed in Western Europe) was reflected in a significant academic commitment to research into the theory and practice of organisations and the term 'organisation' is commonly spelled as 'organization' to reflect the US provenance of much of OT research.

For Thompson and McHugh, Silverman's 'The Theory of Organizations' (1970) signalled the coming of 'the most significant sign of a major alternative to mainstream perspectives' (Thompson and McHugh, 1995, p.369). By the time Burrell and Morgan had 'summed up' the replacement of the single mainstream perspective of Functionalism with a diversity of ways of theorising organisations, Silverman had, to an extent, moved on from his founding work (see Silverman, 1994), but by this time, his 'Social Action Theory', as a variant of 'interpretivism', was established as one of the theoretical 'paradigms' they identified. The basis of Silverman's theory was that, in contradistinction to Functionalist Systems Theory, human beings are not defined by the positions given to them by a system that exists above and beyond their actions; rather, those systems existed only through human action and only through the meanings that humans give to their actions. In this version of organisational

'functioning', how organisations 'are' is how, and why, organisational actors cause them to be.

In the tenor of its time of publication (and in common with Berger and Luckmann's, Social Construction of Reality which, in part, inspired it) Silverman's work was heralded as a radical theory of organisation in the sense that it re-established the significance of the individual in the face of the over-arching goals of 'the system', of any system. However, the impact of the work was restricted both inside and beyond OT, partially for very practical reasons (the book was not widely promoted in the key market for such texts, the USA - see Hassard, 1994) but, more pertinently, because Silverman's work also drew heavily on that of Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology. This, in turn, at a time when certainly European academia was in ferment over exactly how to characterise the relationship between social structure and social action, severely restricted its significance within that ferment, for the simple (and also highly complex) reason that Ethnomethodology denies the 'objective' existence of social structures As Hassard puts it,

> 'ethnomethodologists are concerned to account for how actions are given *meaning* (sic) in the flow of the "life-world" (Schutz and Luckmann 1974) and especially how actors are constantly trying to make sense of the world and interpret what is happening. From this perspective, social structure, instead of being a hard facticity "out there" in the external world, is something that is continuously generated within the process of social construction'. (Hassard, 1994, p.98)

In Hassard's account, Ethnomethodologists concentrate on the analysis of social interaction through a focus on 'how subjects .. make sense of verbal and non-verbal cues'. These cues are referred to as 'indexicals' and their meaning is 'dependent on the context of production'. Human beings constantly encounter each other at work,

in the home, and in their social lives. It is easy to take all of the diverse social relationships and institutions implicated in these encounters for granted, as enjoying an 'objective' existence, above and beyond the human beings that work and play and maintain themselves, but this, for Ethnomethodologists, is to entirely miss the point of how those relationships and institutions are reproduced. As Hassard further observes of the work of Ethnomethodologists:

> 'Their objective is to understand how participants make sense of, and construct, their immediate social situations..( ).. Ethnomethodologists argue that social research should study processes, rather than accept the effects of process as given and proceed from there ... They dissociate themselves from what they see as the dominant orientation within academic sociology .. 'constructive analysis' .. and instead confine themselves to understanding the "awesome indexicality" of everyday accounts. The approach is oriented towards empirical study, and especially to understanding how social actors make sense of common-place events'. (Hassard, 1994, pp.99-100).

The object of researching the case histories in this study was to try to attempt to understand what it is about the production of popular music that so frequently leads to failure. In the discussion of these case histories, and in the discussion of the representation of commodification in the literature, an emphasis has been placed on commodification as a transformative *process.* Similarly, that process has been characterised as a distinctive one in mediational terms for the way in which it proceeds through the constant interaction of pop act, management and record company with the purpose of defining how best to construct, not simply a musical record, but a complete representation of the act to consumers in the market place. Again, within a context that is structurally conflictual, this mediational distinctiveness is expressed by the need to arrive at the definition of the most effective combination of the commodifiable elements of a pop act - its sound, look and story - through the medium of a dominant assertion of the likelihood that a

particular configuration of these elements will be the one most likely to attract mass sales.

Already, the connections with the work of Silverman and with Ethnomethodology should be apparent - three parties come together and, 'through social interaction, make sense of verbal and non-verbal cues'; in this sense-making they 'construct' the commodity and, with it, the experience of commodification. In this version, the failed commodity is the outcome of 'poor construction', in both the senses used here. The problem with this (appealing) notion derives from the general problem identified even by sympathetic critics of Silverman - that, in emphasising the need to understand why people take the actions they do (which actions 'construct' the social world), Social Action Theory, and ethnomethodology as a method and perspective that supports and demonstrates this theory, denies the reality of the structures that define people's lives and that dominate them through inequalities in access to power.

For example, the 'airport' analogy has been used consistently in this study to convey the limitations on the actions of pop acts. The argument will be made below that a pop record and, with it, the act that makes the record, is very much an outcome constructed through interactions, but those interactions can only exist because, somewhere, a bank account exists which is drawn on to pay for studio time; a contract exists that is enforceable in law; a calendar exists by which temporal targets are established for the completion of the commodification process; and retail outlets exist that decide whether or not to stock, and to sell, the proposed commodity. In brief, the 'Action' perspective in the original work of Silverman needed to be reconciled with a sense of 'structure'. By exploring the most significant attempts at resolving apparent dichotomies between 'action' and 'structure' mounted within OT,

some final assessment can be made of why so many signed pop acts fail to make music that becomes popular.

Organisational Theory and Popular Music.

(2). Theory and Practice.

Functionalism posed organisations as systems that, because they *were* systems, were capable of, and amenable to, continuous fine tuning in the pursuit of an 'efficiency' that would serve the interests of employees and customers, alike. But this is a 'managerialism' without resistance and the tension between this view and most other discussions of organisations is, very broadly (given the diversity and incommensurability among them), that the organisation 'on the page' is not the organisation in reality. Silverman's work registered the first major break with the Functionalist version of organisational life but the limitations of his method (discussed above) closed him off from those wider upheavals that first saw Marxism gain an ascendancy in the social sciences only to be supplanted by the various schools collected under the rubric 'post modernism', as Marxism's own deterministic weaknesses were exposed. The relevance for this study of this dense synopsis of two-and-a-half decades of social thought is that various attempts have been mounted to overcome the dichotomy described by the counter-opposition of a 'Systems' approach and an 'Action' approach to social and, in this case, organisational analysis.

In his discussion of Silverman's work, Clegg (1994) makes this generous statement of the 'legacy' of Silverman's foundational work,

> An emphasis on "institutional frameworks" within which people calculate, construct and attempt to accomplish their actions in projects of power is an enduring legacy ... Various institutional frameworks provide the strategic raw

> material for making sense, translating this into action and seeking to enrol others to the sense made. Other interests in and around organizations are involved in precisely the same activities, often in conflict and contradiction to each other. (Clegg, 1994, p. 28)

From this point, Clegg makes the ambitious attempt to 'up-date' Silverman's earliest work in the light of subsequent developments in OT and in social theory in general. Clearly, it would be difficult, and perhaps distracting, to rehearse this entire process here. Instead, I intend to proceed by gathering together previous observations on the experience of pop commodification in the form of a proposal that will connect the mediational experiences of pop acts in general, and of failed acts in particular, with the principal features of Clegg's argument.

Commodification and the 'Supra-Organisation'.

The caution was raised previously that we cannot advance our understanding of pop commodification, and of why so many acts fail within it, by examining each 'party' to commodification in turn and, by this process of 'artificial' separation, drawing conclusions from how it is we believe they 'work'. Rather, the argument continues, we should recognise commodification for what it is - a dynamic whole. On this basis it can be argued that, for the duration of commodification, a 'supra-organisation' comes into existence. Thompson and McHugh define organisations as 'consciously created arrangements to achieve goals by collective means' (Thompson and McHugh, 1995, p.3). I believe it is possible to criticise this definition (particularly in terms of the degree of 'consciousness' involved in their formation and practice) but it will serve to support the proposal that what pop acts, their managers, and the record company staff employed in artist development do when they combine to make a record and to commodify the act is to form a temporary, working alliance

that exhibits, for a limited period, all the primary characteristics of an organisation. If the typical outcome of such alliances is failure, and if such alliances are accepted as transitory 'supra-organisations', then we must explore their marked tendency to create failed products in their inability to function as effective organisations.

Before we proceed, it is worth noting that the term 'function' here is not evidence of an implication that the 'supra-organisation' is conceived as some hermetically-sealed whole. Rather, what problematises the 'supra-organisation' from its inception is that all parties are, simultaneously, members of the commodification 'team' and members of their originating 'teams' - they are members of pop acts that are managed; managers who have employees and separate organisational goals; record company staff who are also working on other 'projects'. In this way, what each constituent brings to the alliance is knowledge and power derived from sources both inside and *outside* the temporary supra-organisation. In recognition that these remarks may be cryptic it is necessary to return to Clegg's assessment of Silverman, and of OT, in general, in order to elucidate them.

Clegg and 'Strategic Agency'.

Clegg's principal criticism of Silverman is that, in his use of the term 'actor' to identify an organisational member, he elides the 'person' with 'agent'. Clegg's argument is that,

> Agency is not a generic term for people: it may well refer to collective forms of decision making such as organization. (Clegg, 1994, p.29)

From here Clegg proposes that, when people are members of organisations, two sources of agency can be determined that may differ considerably in their 'definition

of the organizational situation' - the person and the organisation. He then argues that it is the role of management to ensure that organisational agency predominates over individual conceptions of agency, or over sub-organisational agencies, in order that the goals of the organisation are met. In this sense, organisation is an active, accomplished state, rather than the idealised representation of connecting parts familiar from Functionalism. To attempt to ensure that the organisation does what it was intended to do, managers must work constantly against the resistances to their favoured methods of work organisation that arise in different ways, and from different sectors, of the organisation. As Clegg puts it,

> In large, complex organisations where there is an organisational culture, and not a multiplicity of contradictory cultures rooted in very different life-worlds, some agency must have configured things this way. (Clegg, 1994, p.29)

For Clegg, the 'agency' that has 'configured things this way' is a *strategic agency* - one that,

> depends on the subordination by some power or coalition of powers of the other constitutive parts of the organisation (Clegg, 1994, p. 30)

In this concern with power, Clegg makes the important connection between the Marxist notion of 'the relations of production', in which management attempts to subordinate workers by a variety of strategies that devolve on how tasks are structured and work routines organised; and 'the relations of meaning' a term he derives from Silverman's work in which members of the organisation comply with the roles designated for them by internalising explanations for the goals of the organisation established by management. Neither of these conditions is stable and they will be continually open to contest - even from within the managerial layer itself

where some managers may ally with others and seek to change these relations on the basis that goals will be achieved more effectively by some other means. In any instance, how the organisation functions is a consequence of the configuration of 'strategic agency' and how this defines and organises the organisation for its members. As Clegg puts it,

> The articulation of interests by strategic agencies is thus the medium and outcome of unique positioning over the discretion of others in the strategic field.. its reproduction is power; its transformation effective resistance to it ... (organisational) Topography .. will always be the result of previous and current contest. (Clegg, 1994, p.33)

The immediate criticism might be raised here that we cannot usefully compare a tiny team of people with a 'large complex organisation' but this is an issue of quantity, not of quality. As we have seen, pop commodification brings together three very different 'disciplines' - those of music-making, record-making, and commodity-making. Each of these disciplines, and the 'actors' that practise them, will be differently constructed through different forms of knowledge. Yet, somehow, they must be combined to realise a specific goal - the goal of success, the goal of a mass-selling commodity, the goal of popular music. In Producing Pop, Negus refers to commodification as a 'jigsaw' but the problem with this analogy is its implication that a single, finished 'picture' exists and that everyone involved in pop commodification is working towards the completion of that same picture. It is reasonable to suggest that *all* of the previous analysis has argued against this conception of the pop process. No finished picture can exist because the 'finished picture' is the mass selling commodity and there can be no guarantee that any commodity will attract mass sales. Further, if no finished picture exists, then it follows that, firstly, every party to

commodification will have a different 'finished picture' in his or her head; and, secondly, what final picture is worked to is the result of a combination of verbal approximations and, decisively, the result of a struggle, not just to define the working picture, but to *impose* that working picture on the rest of the supra-organisation.

Viewed in this way, not only is pop commodification structurally conflictual, it is also inherently unstable. What 'destabilises' it is the fact that there is no guarantee that even members of the same pop act will understand (or agree with) each other's version of 'the picture', the 'total star text' (to use Negus's term), they are hoping will be created of them and their work. At the same time, the act and its manager will constantly be negotiating and re-negotiating their combined version of 'the picture'; and, similarly, managers and record companies will negotiate and re-negotiate yet another version of 'the picture', usually without the participation of the act. The reason that so many conflicting versions of a finished picture can come to exist can be argued to be rooted in the peculiar difficulties of commodifying music. The language in which pop is discussed can be very imprecise, even amongst musicians, but, at least musicians can play their parts and adjust them in line with the parts played by their colleagues (although I have been witness to furious rows between musicians who still fail to communicate this way). When non-musicians join the fray and bring the imprecision of their language to bear on what musicians are meant to do, or meant not to have done, then the potential for conflict, instability and generalised incoherence multiplies in an exponential way.

The general tenor of these observations should begin to clarify the relevance of Organisational Theory to this study. Clegg's work draws our attention to the role of agency in organisational practice - where agency can be the work of the organisation

as a whole or of groups or individuals within those organisations. 'Strategic agency' is, then, the attempt,

> to fix interpretation in such a way as to serve the agency's definition of its own interest (Clegg, 1994, p.36)

The contest for the 'fixing' of 'interpretation' and, therefore, for the definition of the commodity, is apparent throughout the case histories. As Clegg further observes,

> Different occupational and organizational identities and positions are marshalled in support of distinct and opposed interpretations. Discursive politics over texts and talk are the normal condition of existence of organization life, from the most innocuous remark or memorandum to .. full-blown engagements. (Clegg, 1994, p.36)

I can verify this in the experience of Latin Quarter through my own part in this definitional power struggle, or in the many such struggles that go on simultaneously in the life of a pop act, and that come to a head in the time-frame of making an album. We can only guess at the detail of these struggles in the experiences of Respect and Roadhouse, but both Robson and Day intimate how conflictual were their respective experiences of commodification.

The Pop Act's experience of the 'Supra-Organisation'.

As we know, most signed pop acts fail at the first hurdle; those that make it over this barrier go on to make money and enjoy fame, but not indefinitely. What such acts must contend with is the fact that they have entered a spiral on which there is no point of rest; either they make another successful record - one that, by the logic of capitalism, needs to be more successful than the previous one - or their record company refuses to take up their 'option' for a further record and, instead, invests its

capital in a new signing. Even so, at least a successful act should be better prepared for the next round of the commodification process. 'Preparation' alone is no guarantee, however, that they will survive commodification to make the record they want and one that is promoted in and through a representation of them as an act that they feel able to 'live with'. There are many more factors in pop success than this, but, from the experience of the acts in the case histories, we can see that if 'preparation' is not the guarantee of success, it is at least its *invitation.*

To amplify the last point, Respect and Roadhouse were argued to have focused on their music and their style at the expense of other, equally important considerations. Put crudely, they failed to 'take care of business' - and this same charge can be levelled at Latin Quarter; but what does this expression mean? All an act has to recommend itself to record companies, to the market-place and to the world, is its combination of a sound, a look and a story. To 'take care of business' is to know how to organise these elements and to mobilise them towards the realisation of a goal - success. 'Organisation' and 'mobilisation' towards a target implies, and demands, the drafting of a strategy. Respect, as a pop act, had no strategy of its own, and the strategy they were eventually forced to pursue by their manager ('forced' in the sense that they had no alternative) ended in failure. Further, they only acceded to the strategy of this comparative stranger because their own initial lack of strategy had led them into a series of intermediary connections and experiences that they did not initiate, nor could they control. But acts are like that, it is in their nature. To reiterate an earlier observation, pop acts are small businesses striving to become huge businesses almost over-night, yet they have no business experience, qualifications or, often, even raw acumen to help them; equally, they have no external agencies to which to turn to help them prepare for pop commodification - all they have is a

sound, a look and a story and they go casting around for anyone that might 'help' them bring their unique combination of these aspects to the widest possible public. In the case of Roadhouse, they lacked even a wrong or ineptly applied strategy of their own and their experience was, in some ways, worse than that of Respect - who at least had a 'good time' ('Respect went on a bender for eighteen months' - in their search for a 'style' and an 'attitude' - as Josie Robson put it) until their dreadful dénouement.

Latin Quarter's lack of 'preparation' is better understood as an almost complete lack of internal coherence. This incoherence took a multiplicity of forms - my own naievety about the status of my song-writing; Skaith's naive refusal of 'pop stardom'; our joint confusion about the 'political' nature of Latin Quarter; the virtual imposition of five strangers to contend with as band members, to name but a very few. But, if we could get as close to Respect and Roadhouse as we can to Latin Quarter then we would be likely to find an equal degree of internal incoherence in their cases (for example, Day reports the loss of coherence around the name change from 'EastWest' to 'Roadhouse' as a downward point). For an act to be incoherent about why it is doing what it is doing must be the worst preparation of all for the commodification process.

The absence of internal coherence expresses itself in a lack of clear direction, an absence of strategy for the promotion by the act of its own interests and, decisively an inability to assert or create any degree of strategic agency inside the 'supra-organisation' they enter once commodification is under way. On this basis, we can confirm that it is not, necessarily, the changes that acts and their material are forced to experience that leads to failure but how well they cope with the pressures and stresses of transformation. Many factors influence why consumers do or do not buy

records, but it is certain that the record market is not a perfect one - acts do not enter the market on an equal footing. This is not a factor of over-production, it is a factor of over-signing by record companies. Commodification is a perilous process for acts, they must convince record companies at all stages that what they are likely to produce is likely to sell in order that they retain the company's best efforts with regard to them (rather than switching attention to another of its signings).

Within the supra-organisation an act must fight for its own definition of itself and its material, but it can only conduct that fight effectively if it knows the extent of the record companies commitment to it, and intentions for it. However, acts can never truly gain this knowledge because they never truly engage with 'the record company' as an entity but only with the few staff assigned to work with them. Further, it is the act's manager who spends most time in substantive discussion with record staff. In this way, an act endures a double- or even triple-mediation - they are represented by a manager to a record company 'team'; by that 'team' to the rest of the company, nationally and internationally; and by that company to the market. In this way, acts are structurally disadvantaged within commodification. Because their objective structural position is a weak one, any degree of internal incoherence on their part will weaken them further. In this regard, management is a problematic 'resource' for the act: firstly, a manager will have an over-riding commitment to his or her own career, whatever their relationship to the act; secondly, managers are mediators not music-makers and, at the very least, they will come quickly to 'speak the language' of mediation. Under this condition, the act has no recourse to any other agency or resource to support its position; instead, it is drawn into a discourse of the definition of the 'final picture' that will almost certainly be established and maintained by the mediators - management and record company - that they *must*

work with if they are to become 'successes'. On this basis, it is not necessarily the case that failed acts experience more conflict than successful ones, but it is very likely that acts who fail lack the ability to withstand the conflict that is structural to, and endemic in, commodification.

Conclusion.

Why so many signed pop acts fail to make hit records and fail, therefore, to make music that is truly *popular* music, is not due, simply, to the negative impact on them of intermediaries; rather, it is the potentially negative experience of mediation that newly-signed, aspirant pop acts so frequently fall foul of. This does not mean that we should not ask hard questions about intermediary figures and about their claims to expertise, but the lengthy argument mounted through this study has come to devolve on the pop act's preparation for mediation, rather than on the effects of mediation itself. In this way, acts are not the victims either of bad faith or ill-luck; rather, again, they are the victims of their own naivety in an environment that punishes the naive.

Addendum to the Conclusion.

In drawing the above conclusion I am aware that several large questions are begged by it - notably, how do we know that successful acts are not equally naive; and how can we demonstrate this naivety in practice? I feel that the value of this conclusion lies, not in providing a definitive answer to these questions, but in furnishing a method through which they might be answered. This method would be to explore the usefulness of the supra-organisation as an heuristic device by adopting

the research method favoured by Silverman in demonstrating 'the practical rationality of actors in particular settings' (Silverman 1994, p. 6). As researchers into pop we need to know why musical decisions are taken by composers and why, also, decisions both about music and about music-makers are taken by intermediary figures and institutions in the ways that they are. Unless we can identify why some sounds (and sound-makers) were committed to tape in certain ways, and why records of those sounds were sold, or failed to be sold, for certain reasons, then all we conduct is guesswork about pop of varying degrees of sophistication.

Silverman identifies his method as 'Ethnomethodological Ethnography'. As we have seen, Cohen has made an eloquent plea for a greater commitment to ethnography in PMS. Arguably, ethnomethodological ethnography strengthens the ethnographer's hand by allowing the researcher to identify, in Hassard's words, 'how power relations are reflected in .. forms of language' (Hassard, 1990, p. 106). When 'forms of language' can be argued to be so decisive to the prosecution of musical and commodification decisions in pop, then we ignore them at our peril. This observed, it remains the case that ethnomethodology presents researchers with the additional meta-methodological problem of its refusal of structure as a dimension of organisational existence. In this regard, we can only be guided by those efforts made, separately, by theorists such as Giddens and Clegg to furnish what Wilmott has described as a framework, 'designed to reveal how "agency" and "structure" are simultaneously present in the accomplishment of social practices'. (Willmott, 1990, p. 52)

On the basis of the above, it is possible to represent this research as 'preliminary' to further discrete, but related, research projects into three aspects of popular music-making:

1. The 'lived experience' of the pop act during commodification requires detailed attention. It has not been possible to explore the studies either of Stokes or Hennion in this research but their works remain touchstones for investigation into, and reflection on, the experience of commodification. Both studies need to be 'up-dated' and re-located in a British context - the 'next stage' of Cohen's foundational project is now overdue. However, in mounting an ethnography of the 'signed act', the 'holistic' approach argued previously would seem to have a role to play.

2. It has been implied throughout this study that music-making is not an autonomous activity - the musical decisions of composers have been argued to derive, in the first instance, from their *consumption* of (successful) music; further, composers have been argued to be at least pressurised by the demands of the commodification process. These broadly industrial dimensions of compositional practice have been argued to be absent from musicological accounts of popular music-making. Again, through a dynamic, holistic approach to the pop process, the relationship between popular music 'texts' and popular music 'contexts' might be broached - arguably through a new system of notation.

3. In the discussion of commodification through the heuristic device of the 'supra organisation', the notion of 'process' as dynamic and transformative played a pivotal role. What, again, was implied but remained unexplored in the analysis of the dynamics of process was a broader analysis of the origins and expressions of *power* within the processes that make up commodification. A caution against deterministic explanations for the power of record companies, and of intermediaries in general, is raised at several junctures in the argument, but the existence of power in record-making as a force that is derived *culturally* as much as economically needs to be theorised.

Pop Music is a social practice; it is the product neither of the 'artist' working alone, nor of the 'standardising' efforts of global media conglomerates. In order to understand what pop is, we need to be able to explore that practice as a whole; consequently, our method of analysis needs to be an holistic one. Ultimately, we should understand records in the dual sense of recordings and of diaries or logs - a record is the outcome of all the process interactions that led to its recording and release; and to its fate as a commodity. To begin to explore the social practice, and social process, of record-making we require a method that allows us access, physically and conceptually, to that process. *This* is the true conclusion to this research.

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